LIGHT IN THE OFFING

BY

HILARY DECCAN

So now that shadow of mischance appear'd
No graver than as when some little cloud
Cuts off the fiery highway of the sun,
And isles a light in the offing.

TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Kilcoran	1
II.	The Lady of the Tower	32
III.	Jolly Companions every one	85
IV.	Charity at the Cross	117
V.	Father Tom lays the Devil	141
VI.	The Captain covered with Glory	181
VII.	My Dame has lost her Shoe	233
VIII.	The Alarm Bell	284

LIGHT IN THE OFFING.

CHAPTER I.

KILCORAN.

Is there, among the possible few who may scan these pages, one whose early memories carry him back to Ireland in 1847? If so, words of mine are little needed and of poor avail to conjure up for him that time once experienced never forgotten: a strange, wild period, when the absolute starvation, misery, and death, that stalked remorseless over the face of the blight-stricken land, hardly brought to the glazing eye and quivering mouth the baleful bitterness that

disfigures them now. Dying, starving, racked by pain and disease, with only a ditch for bed, and the stars to appeal to in the long nights of delirium, in the grasp of the awful Shadow—-typhus ; yet a little momentary lightening of the burden, a passing gleam of watery sunshine, and the merry laugh rang out, and the buoyant Irish nature re-asserted itself with the beautiful forgetfulness of a child. They bore no malice. The hand of the Lord had borne heavily on them ; thick darkness compassed them around ; but they still held to the faith of their fathers. The good priest, as he went among them night and day, giving the last crust from his table and the very coat from his back, still taught them that the day was coming when their sins would be forgiven, and their heavy punishment be brought to a

close. So Hope held her own against fearful odds; at wakes and funerals, albeit bread itself was a rarity, 'the drop o' the cratur,' so indispensable to 'keeping the heart up,' was always mysteriously present; and Paddy was as ready to exchange a joke and a 'top o' the mornin' to your honour' with his landlord, as he now is to take a pot-shot at him from behind the hedge of his boreen.

It would be a sadder world than it is if the snow-drop did not struggle through the dead leaves of last year, if old Sol could not shoot his arrows through the densest skirts of the passing storm.

Where the long rollers of the Atlantic strike and break with fiercest energy over the rocky spears that oppose them, flinging aloft with majestic deliberation their grand

white columns of foam, the land slopes gradually upwards till it reaches a certain commanding headland, isolated and bleak, which seems to have the whole great dominion of Neptune stretched beneath it, and which is itself rendered more conspicuous by being crowned with a nondescript building of square shape known to the country around as the Grey Tower. This shall be described more minutely by-and-by, but in the meantime our story opens in the vale below.

Within sound of the sea, yet hidden from it by the light undulations of field and fallow between, stood in a hollow a house of no pretensions to beauty in itself, and showing little indication of taste in its surroundings. It was long and roomy, grey and weather-stained, adorned with no gracious sheltering of tree or shrub

saving a few isolated thorns and elders, nature's free gifts, which had started up here and there, beside some out-house or stable, in the generous, charitable way such weedlings have. Straggling farm buildings lay around in open ugliness; and winding through them a fenceless lane led down to a lake—a dull sheet of despondent water, whose surface never got leave to sparkle for the dense tangle of weed and rush that well-nigh choked it. Yet here and there a couple of lonely swans still pushed their way, and, little tended as they were, yet managed to eke out a precarious living in the wonderful way peculiar to their country; even observing the very letter of their duty by laboriously hatching a cygnet or two among the furze on the slimy shore, to be killed off by the inevitable 'late' frost, a yearly season of lamentation.

There was an evident lack of woman's hand about the place. The bare, grey, mortared walls of the house stared at you unabashed, unshackled by tendril of flower or vine—saving, indeed, a curious, clinging growth at one end near the garden door, which, in very sooth, was the result of accident, and not of deliberate planting. Here, where a chance berry had been dropped, a shoot had sprung up and taken hold, and, with the slow march of years, had twisted its gnarled mass into a grey-green pall about the end window, that after all left the house no better adorned than a man might be with half his beard shaved off. For the bare unsightliness of all the rest dominated this small spot of verdure, as the great desert does its oasis.

Opposite this gable stood a door in the arch of what had once been a strong and

solid wall; now dilapidated, mossy, and fern-crowned. Here, indeed, Nature had her way. As you stepped through the arch, the rusty hinges threatening to give way with the swing of the door, a shower of white rose-leaves greeted your entrance, and the long, heavily-clustered branches had to be parted perforce ere you could find the path that led into the depths of this domestic jungle; albeit, the season must be summer, of course. Forests of raspberries, red and white; thickets of gooseberry-bushes with topaz fruit; and long, swampy beds of neglected strawberries lay melting in the sun; while the blackbirds and thrushes, rendered insolent by plenty, whetted their beaks and jaded appetites rather on a few misguided creeping things whose burnished livery gleaming in the sun had been their 'sad undoing.'

Here, in the long, June days, diamond spider films hung on the box hedges—borders once of close-cut trimness; and, as the hot rays glowed and poured down into the sheltered nook till it seemed a very cauldron, each tiny blossom expanded to its fullest, and every insect that had a voice raised its shrill trumpet to swell the all-pervading hum. And there were flowers here, of the beautiful, hardy kind that need no fostering—strangely mixed up with unlovely pot-herbs and dismal remains of kitchen provender—long, straight lilies and sunflowers, whose god returned their faithfulness right royally; fleur-de-lis of a purple fit for Juno's mantle; and great cabbage roses, whose stems grew faint with their weight. All this in the glorious summer days.

But now the chill breath of winter was abroad; the tottering door remained closed, having had the assistance of a rusty nail or two; the ungravelled walks reflected the sunset in their swampy surface—a sickly, pale gleam that died even as you looked at it. Night was drawing on with a sudden rush, like despair. The only gleam of brightness likely to last came from the end window where the gnarled mantle hung; the fitful radiance of a fire. The fire was in the dining-room of Kilcoran House, and, with your leave, we will enter and make acquaintance with its inmates.

That they were father and son a passing glance made evident. The elder man, as he lay back in his heavy chair, had still the straightness of limb and breadth of shoulder of a powerful youth—a youth of fox-hunting and hard drinking, that held

its own mightily, after all, and only left him with an occasional twinge of gout and, if possible, an emptier purse than before as recompense. Just at present his enemies had fallen foul of him with more than usual acrimony; gout and impecuniosity had him by the heels literally and metaphorically. One leg was swathed and extended on a rest; that it did not suffer itself to be forgotten for many minutes at a time was evident enough. At his side lay a toothless old hound, the last companion of many a merry spin, its bleared eyes fixed on its master, silent and sympathizing. Philip Darcy's gaze was fixed on the fire, which glowed with the dull red intensity that is only to be got in perfection from peat—or turf, as it is locally designated. His shaggy eyebrows were drawn downwards over eyes of a greyish

hue, shrewd-looking, and piercing. The pictures they seemed to trace in the glowing caverns were not of a pleasing sort; the old hound intuitively found that out, and refrained even from touching with his cold muzzle the hand whose sinewy grasp was on the chair-arm.

Now and again Philip Darcy shot a glance, half-angry, half-curious, at his son, whose air was as abstracted as his own. The young man was leaning forward, elbow on knee, his chin in his hand. He seemed to have well-nigh forgotten his surroundings. He had all his father's massiveness of frame combined with the roundness and elasticity of youth, and the aquiline hardness of the one face was in the other softened to a perfection of outline Antinous might envy. The crisp locks, too, might have been his, worn with

unconventional shortness for the fashion of the day. Long lashes shaded the downcast eyes; the curves of the clean-shaved lip and chin were of almost womanly beauty. In the free-and-easy fashion of the day he had evidently dined just as he had arrived from the hunt, in red coat and boots by no means spotless. His cap and whip lay on the floor where he had thrown them himself. A red setter lay at his feet, and a clever-looking little terrier sat alert with one ear cocked towards the wainscot, hungrily suspicious of rats.

When at last the old man broke the silence, it was as if his mind had been carrying on the thread of some earlier discussion.

'And there's Tim Brady, the omadhaun!—faith, 'tis a regular screech-owl he is—never showin' himself but to bring

bad luck! As if I hadn't fire and fury enough in this leg o' mine to buy off fifty years o' purgatory, down he comes with his face as long as a lawyer's bill, to tell me he doesn't know where on the blessed earth we're going to get seed this year for the planting. There's a bill o' five years' standing on the book-shelf yonder, from Mick Donovan. He's got a wife dying of consumption and a family of ten or a dozen starving, and it's money down he must have now or no dealings.'

Philip Darcy's treatment of the Queen's English was variable and peculiar. He had been well enough educated to know better, but he had acquired the habit, in talking to his inferiors, of lowering his style and accent to their level, greatly to his own detriment eventually, as the clod was slowly and remorselessly effacing

the gentleman. When talking to his son, he now and then pulled himself up, taking more pains with his pronunciation, so as not to shock the young man's more fastidious susceptibilities; the result to an uninitiated listener being rather startling, as it had the effect of two people speaking at once.

'The whole of the land is cryin' out for manure. Sure, it's been cropped an' cropped every year till divil another blade can be got out of it. Faith, I'd as soon start to plough the big bog at Cahilmore.——An' there isn't a gate on its hinges,—no, faith!—not one that will keep out as much as a gander. Furze bushes and old peasticks are mighty convanient, to be sure, but you don't like the look o' them yourself.'

His son still remaining a passive listener—if indeed his ears were open at all—to these harrowing details, the old man made a movement of impatience which might perhaps have been induced by a reminder from his bodily enemy; the glance shot from under his shaggy brows, however, suggested anger as well.

'What in the name of all that's cross-grained and senseless have you against the girl?' he blurted out, suddenly, as though abandoning all circuitous approaches, and making a dive head foremost into the gist of the discussion.

His son seemed to shake off his abstraction with an effort, and throwing himself back in his chair plunged his hands into his pockets with a frown, administering a very unmerited kick at the same time to the setter, which the good-tempered animal

accepted with a short yelp and wag of his tail, taking care, however, to remove himself to a more respectful distance from his short-tempered master.

'Yes, you won't meet a better-lookin' nor a livelier from here to Dublin City. Lord, but times are changed when Phil Darcy's son has to be coaxed an' wheedled into acceptin' a pretty girl with a fortune at her back that would make him king o' the county!'

'It seems to me that you are uncommonly sanguine about all your premises, sir,' said his son, with a sneer. 'You take too much for granted; the size of the lady's fortune for one thing, and her readiness to bestow it on your impecunious son for another.'

'Humph,' answered his father; 'as to the last, I have eyes in my head. And, with

regard to her fortune, I know to a penny what Tom Standish got with his wife, and that he neither hunts nor bets nor drinks, though I won't deny he can bring down a snipe or a woodcock pretty decently when he tries, and is the neatest hand at landing a salmon or a trout you need care to see. But that's a tame kind o' sport, after all, an' costs nothing; not to be compared to a tearin' spin after the hounds, with the risk of a broken neck, and the piper to pay for it all sure enough. Hunters and racers and hounds don't live on air, more's the pity.'

This undeniable flaw in the economy of nature for a moment distracted his thoughts from the subject in hand, but his son knew he would hark back upon it soon enough, which he presently did.

'A girl that the Lord-Leftenant himself might be proud to make up to. And you, though I am your father, an' you're just the moral of what I was at your age—you, though I say it who shouldn't, as good-lookin' a young fellow as ever donned a red coat, afraid indeed to try your luck, as if you were a hunchback, or squint-eyed, or—agh, the divil himself couldn't fathom it!' he ended, his eloquence being suddenly checked by a twinge from the bale of white stuff on the rest.

His son rose, and in aimless fashion sauntered to the window, where through the parted crimson curtains nothing was visible save the pitchy darkness of a moonless winter night. Gazing out into it, while he unconsciously whistled some fragment of an air through his half-closed teeth, I doubt that, had harlequin's wand

conjured up for him all that lights and movement could produce of panoramic splendour—say the Place de l'Opéra on a gala-night, or a Chinese feast of lanterns itself—his preoccupied mind would but tardily acknowledge the change. Leaning on the window-sill, he tapped a soft accompaniment to the tune he whistled, the wind outside now and again taking up a hollow refrain. His father sat watching him silently, his keen eyes half-hidden by shaggy brows.

Phil Darcy was a shrewd man and a hard one. He was the best judge of horseflesh in the county, and he would sell you—or his own brother—a miserable screw, whose days were numbered, for sixty times its value to the knacker, and laugh at you to your face afterwards for being fool enough to be taken in. And, strange to

say, the absolute dishonesty of the transaction was but little regarded—it was the mortification of being over-reached which touched his client most, causing him to lie low in sullen expectation of being able one day to repay the debt with usury. So that among a certain class—the horsey fraternity—Phil Darcy reigned a king.

He had another reputation—not quite as openly spoken of—of having in days gone by cheated His Gracious Majesty King George out of many a pound of revenue, that too under the very noses of the gaugers and preventive men, who were either less efficient then or more open to bribery than their unsympathetic successors. Indeed, it was pretty well known that at Phil Darcy's own table many a good jug of claret, many a steaming bowl of punch, was emptied with convivial song

and chorus, till the red dawn shone upon His Majesty's incorruptible officials, safely bestowed under the shining mahogany, with a claw leg for a bolster.

But of late degenerate days such high jinks had fallen into disrepute, and the clever men-o'-war's-men who mostly filled the ranks of the coastguard were alert, and, alas! strictly virtuous. No more cakes and ale; no more manning of the long boat on cloudy nights, when the scout had run in with his breathless message, and from cook to scullion the house quivered with expectation and delight. Times were indeed changed, and not till the uttermost farthing had been paid of its dues did the cup now flow and wassail reign in the ancestral hall of the Darcys. And the number of such occasions had gradually waxed few and far between, as

the purse of its owner fell into a condition of chronic emptiness that made payment of anything whatsoever a constantly-recurring difficulty, a life problem that seemed never any nearer the solving.

Now, for some time back, since ever his son had returned, a handsome stripling, from college, Phil Darcy's brain had been hatching a pretty little scheme whereby the family fortunes might be considerably retrieved. It was, of course, a matrimonial project. His handsome son was to lay himself and his debts at the feet of the pretty and only daughter of a near neighbour of theirs, a quiet, studious man who, being the lucky possessor of a decent competence, was still more rarely lucky in knowing how to use without abusing it.

To Phil Darcy's surprise and annoyance, his son was slow to rise at this tempting

bait. He knew of all the young man's straits and difficulties; were they not indeed his own? But for the opportune demise of an aunt who, fortunately, had nobody else to leave her trifling share of this world's goods to, old Trinity could not have done as much as it did for Lawrence Darcy. That the old 'varsity had done her best for him there was no denying; that is to say, she offered him of her best, and he accepted just as much of it as cost him the smallest possible amount of trouble. Being a youth of tolerably quick parts, he took on with ease the tone and polish of city life; but in Minerva's temple he was but a lukewarm worshipper; in fact, he seemed to like her least of all the goddesses. But Phil Darcy was satisfied with the smattering of learning his son brought back with him when he looked at

his magnificent proportions, and saw him start on Beelzebub, the incorrigible chestnut, for his first morning's ride.

And now, 'What the divil was the matter with the boy?' was the problem that made keen glances flash in the firelight from his half-shut eyes as he watched Lawrence gazing blankly at nothing from the window.

Suddenly his son turned round, and walked towards him.

'Look here, father,' he said, with a sort of gulp as if swallowing a pill, 'I see and understand everything you can tell me about the place going to rack and ruin; I know every word of it's true. Do you think I don't quail and shiver at the very sight of anyone coming near us to spy out the poverty we are getting deeper and deeper into. Am I not ready

myself to do anything—go a-soldiering, to sea, be a tinker, tailor, or parson—ay, faith, I'd make a pretty parson, wouldn't I?' with a reckless laugh.

'As good as many another,' said his father.'

'Well, choose what I may, you know you've always had a word to say against it. You won't let me go away, and you know there isn't anything left for a gentleman to do in this miserable hole, unless I turn gauger; that's a fine, law-upholding profession.'

'The Lord forbid!' ejaculated the old man, piously. 'You're not as low as that yet, my boy.'

'So the summing-up of the matter is, that I am to walk down to Clovernook some fine morning, and say to Tom Standish, just as if I were bringing him an

invitation to dinner, that my father and I will feel immensely obliged if he will hand me over all the ready money he can spare —along with, of course, the hand of his daughter—to patch up the tottering walls of Kilcoran, and help to pay a few of our debts. 'Pon my soul, sir, it's a splendid idea; but, if my intended father-in-law were to chuck me out of the library-window before I'd well got through with my message, I don't think I'd have impudence enough to resent it.'

'And does the girl herself count for nothing?' said his father, impatiently. 'Sweethearts are scarce enough round here, let alone a strapping young chap like yourself that can give her a lead in a rattling spin to hounds, or show the way in a steeple-chase, as if necks and legs were to be had new for the askin'. Didn't I watch her at the

Derryshane races? Faith, her eyes were never off you, and her lips trembled so that she could hardly speak when you and Beelzebub came sauntering in with never a hair turned on either of you. An' all the rest nowhere! Not even Jack Becher's Blackberry Jam, that was to beat the whole Curragh as he boasted. Agh! as if I couldn't have told him he hadn't the ghost of a chance the moment I saw him in the saddle.'

'I don't know that it makes it any the better if the girl is inclined to like me,' said his son, as he leaned on the mantel-piece and gloomily contemplated the dull, glowing embers. 'She'll be the worse pleased when she discovers 'twas her money and not herself I came to woo.'

'And why *not* herself, I'd like to know?' asked his father, sharply. 'Faith, since

the days when your mother, rest her sowl, used to give you a dose of black draught every time you sneezed or got the hiccups, I haven't seen you make an uglier face over anything. An' all this mighty to do when a piece of luck is offered you that's a hundred times better than you deserve, there's no denyin' that.'

'I don't deny it,' answered his son. 'Far from that, I can't help seeing that if she does not come to hate and despise me I shall at any rate have the advantage of knowing for the rest of my life that I thoroughly deserve her doing so.'

'Pshaw!' said his father, 'that sort of talk is mighty fine for a romance or a piece of play actin', but it isn't common sense. Faith, I never knew before you reckoned yourself such a bad bargain. Screw up your courage, man, and go and court the

girl as if you meant it; maybe you'd like Micky Doolan the dancin'-master to come and give you a lesson in the art o' courtship. By the powers, you're no son o' mine if you need it!'

Lawrence did not seem greatly to heed this shaft of satire. In musing silence he continued to gaze into the fire, his lips drawn tight, and brows contracted. A struggle of some sort was evidently going on while that grim silence lasted, and his father saw it and waited. He was too old a sportsman to frighten his quarry by a premature movement.

At last the young man looked up with a sigh.

'Give me a week,' he said, turning abruptly to his father. 'A week to—to think it over. I promise you that at the end of it I will give you a decided

answer. Maybe by that time the prospect of running my head into the noose will have grown more tolerable.'

He shrugged his shoulders with a laugh that was more bitter than mirthful, and, vowing he was dead tired, kicked off his boots, bade his father good-night, and retired, followed by the terrier, who, catching sight of a staid tabby as the door was opened, compensated himself for his late enforced decorum by a wild rush and clamour after her vanishing tail, that enabled him to trot to his couch with some proper return of self-respect.

Phil Darcy nodded his head two or three times in silence, and the old hound blinked at him as if anxious to be taken into confidence.

'H'm,' he muttered, 'there's some other girl at the bottom of it. Now, who the

deuce can it be?—Pshaw! some red-cheeked colleen at the village, I'll go bail—some passing fancy that will blow over in a week. A week he said?—well, we'll see, then, what a week will do. Hurry no man's cattle—and freedom's sweet, there's no denyin' it; but Connie Standish's money would bring back something like the ould days to Kilcoran.'

CHAPTER II.

THE LADY OF THE TOWER.

Next morning dawned with all the light and beauty of spring—one of the freaks that Nature is prone to in this not very consistent island. The sun shone clear and cold in the cloudless blue of the sky, making diamond-mines of the dew-spangled hedges, and mirrors of the little shallow pools that filled the ruts of the untended roads. And it shone on the glossy coat of Lawrence's bay roadster—not Beelzebub ; he was reserved particularly for those high festivals when it pleased his master to put

his neck in jeopardy—as he pranced and flung out with sheer delight at starting on what promised to be a splendid day's outing.

Lawrence rode as his countrymen *can* ride, with an ease and grace suggestive of a centaur; for every movement of the horse seems to emanate direct from the rider. The air was so clear and still that sounds were borne for miles with a distinctness that was at times almost startling, and the ring of the horse's hoofs along the road was probably heard at the little village two miles ahead as clearly as the shout of some urchins at play and the stroke of a hammer on an anvil which came from thence to Lawrence's ears as he broke from a trot into a gallop over the long stretch of utterly lonely road. Only once did he meet with anything human before

reaching the straggling collection of cabins designated the village; a miserable, gaunt woman, with starvation written on her drawn, parchment-coloured face, stalking despairingly along, with a sick child rolled in the ragged cloak on her back. In a mute, half-hearted way she held out her hand, and, when he half-reined up to toss her a sixpence, surprise seemed to have taken away all power to express her gratitude. But, as he rode on, her prayers and ejaculations of blessing followed him, and but for the burden on her back she would have bent her tottering knees on the wet ground, in appeal to heaven for his sake. For of the miles she had travelled that day all she had met were too poor to do more than bid God help her, for they could not.

As Lawrence rode past the half-dozen

mud cabins, with long grass waving on the roofs, nourished by the rotten thatch, the smith looked out from his shed, and his red-haired, freckled daughter from the cabin at its side, and both shouted a greeting to the 'young masther,' whose handsome face and 'illigant sate on a horse' they and all the country-side took pride in. For 'wasn't he wan o' the ra'al ould stock' and a Catholic to boot, the latter a very potent spell of allegiance. But Lawrence, though he answered them in mechanical fashion, hardly knew that he had been spoken to, for his eyes and thoughts were turned to the grey tower, which, with its flag-staff at the side, stood solid and bluff against the dazzling blue, on the hill up which the road now wound.

And, for the quarter-of-an-hour it is

likely to take him to make the ascent, let us take quicker flight to the top, and see for ourselves what awaits him.

The actual *raison d'être* of the Grey Tower was to provide suitable residence for the officer in charge of the coastguard stations which lay in three scarcely defined and much exposed coves on that wild coast. It was a queer-looking edifice, like a biscuit-tin set on end, with another smaller one at one side, and a flag-staff enclosed in a circular garden at the other. Square and grim, it could afford to laugh at the elements, for it had been built with fortress-like strength; and well was it so, for it was buffeted by every wind that blows, and the salt spray of the Atlantic was carried like dew to its windows from the breakers below. Small windows these were, and every one of them double-sashed,

and from the topmost ones was visible a great glittering semicircle of sea, sometimes fair and peaceful as a sleeping babe, sometimes grey and foam-flecked, with the white horses rearing ominous crest out of the mist, and flinging hissing columns of salt spray on to the green-topped cliffs, where wild thyme and dog-roses looked down over sea-pinks and samphire.

East and west, at nightfall, three strong lights shone out like stars from three headlands, where now in the clear sunlight only the fretful rush and beat of the sea on the brown rocks revealed their perilous foundations.

For many miles round there was no higher point of land, and, as a natural consequence, so bleak and unsheltered was it that neither tree nor flower could brave the mighty blasts that tore and fought

round the imperturbable walls; at times with wild, demoniac yells rattling the cordage of the stout signal-mast, and making tatters of the luckless flag on duty for the nonce; shaking the sashes of the double windows as though a troop of evil spirits were bent on getting in; tearing over the daisy-flecked fields, and chasing the swift cloud-shadows like a flock of frightened sheep. Some little attempt there was, however, to cultivate a few hardy flowers; within the circling wall of the 'mast-yard,' sweet-Williams displayed their glorious velvety crimson, and columbines and Canterbury bells, wall-flower, and pansies winked in the summer sun, and did their utmost to compete with the irrepressible southern wood to scent the morning air.

There was the regulation prevalence of

whitewash and new paint everywhere inseparable from a coastguard residence; the gates were in a chronic condition of wetness which came off on your fingers; even the mast either had a new coat yesterday, or was going to have it to-morrow.

At the back of the house lay the stables and farm-yard, as well as a walled-in garden, which with an effort produced such sturdy edibles as could defy the elements; gaunt kale and straggling rows of peas, whose fluttering white blossoms as often as not were laid low with their faithless props, when the drowsy sun took his first peep at them in the morning.

The house was surrounded by a broad gravel sweep; gravel ankle-deep, redolent of the ocean; round and blue, and glistening here and there with tiny white shells. It was always being renewed, and always

bringing with it that delightful aroma of the sea, and suggestions of sheltered coves where the mermaids came to sing and comb their long locks in the moonlight, while the waves lay hushed and still to make their mirror.

This walk commanded so excellent a view that it was daily occupied by a blue-jacket with his telescope, whose duty it was to watch every craft that hove in sight, and signal to the adjacent stations if its behaviour seemed in the smallest degree suspicious. Of late years, since smuggling had become altogether too risky a profession for nineteenth century notions of comfort, this vigilance, though as strictly kept up as ever, was in reality very much a matter of form and routine. Yet the jolly tar who, after serving his time in a man-o'-war, was now comfortably

berthed ashore as a coastguardsman, walked his beat with as sharp an eye for a sail as he had ever done in the long watch in days of yore. And for his greater assistance there ran on the seaward side of the tower a flight of stone steps protected by a parapet-wall, which, beginning under the front windows, wound suddenly round the corner and upwards to within a yard of the roof, where they terminated in a platform, about three feet square, still protected by the circling wall. Under these steps an arched recess was dignified with the name of 'the watch-house,' because here in wet weather the watchman might retire, only sallying out occasionally to hold the glass to his eye, and, like Nelson, 'see nothing;' like him, too, manfully determined that, in regard to doing his duty, England's expectations

should in no wise be disappointed.

Close by was moored a wooden dog-house tenanted by a somewhat ill-conditioned brown water-spaniel, whose temper was certainly not improved by his being chained up all day, while allowed to roam at will at night. Though in reality an arrant coward, he was the terror of the poor, tattered wretches who came to beg, and who crept trembling round the opposite wall when he darted out upon them unexpectedly, half-choking himself in his struggles with his chain, and barking and snarling till he was hoarse.

To return to the particular day and hour when Lawrence Darcy had just succeeded in opening the gate, and had commenced the ascent of a rather long avenue, Gwenda Chetwynd was standing at the head of the stairs before-mentioned, her

arms resting on the wall and her eyes turned dreamily to the great line of winking, silvery sea that seemed on the far horizon to melt and blend into the blue of the meeting sky. A light shawl was drawn partly over her head and round her shoulders, but the wind was playing freely with her rich brown hair, and blowing its tendrils about the fine clear lines of her level brows unheeded.

It was a beautiful face that was set so thoughtfully seaward—a face in which one felt instinctively the promise and presence of a glorious womanhood, yet veiled in the delightful reticence of youth ; just as when the silvery haze of breaking day, while trying to obscure, but renders a thousand times more beautiful the streaks of golden light that pierce it.

An artist might well have staked his

dearest hopes of fame on the chance of transferring to lasting canvas her expression and attitude; of catching the wistful thoughtfulness of the deep grey eyes and sweet half-melancholy curve of that perfect mouth, or tracing the willowy outline of her form as she stood with hands laid palm to palm against her cheek,—a cheek that the most delicate shell on the shore below could hardly vie with.

She was dreamily watching a stately brig that, with great white wings all set, was making its way steadily, though almost imperceptibly, across the wide plain of water. In fancy she followed it through nights of storm and terror, when the blue gleam of the lightning alone revealed the seething fury around; in fancy she saw it still battling bravely on, when the red sun gleamed angrily through the

mists of morning; sails tattered, cordage loose, the gallant pennants shred like leaves on the wind; battered, bruised, but not conquered. And so at last the haven is reached; the blue bay where the cocoa-nut palm is mirrored, and the perfume of a thousand flowers is in the air, and birds like living jewels dart through the fierce light unceasingly.

So absorbed is she in her pretty picturing that her ears fail to catch the sound of the horse's hoofs as Lawrence rides into the stable-yard.

Here he finds the man-of-all-work, Pat Casey, busy cleaning harness, which for convenience sake he has hung over the stable door.

Well out in the sunlight, Ben Weatherly, the watchman for the day, is established, with a large round tub balanced on a

three-legged stool in most precarious fashion, in which said tub his brawny arms are immersed to the elbow. Soap-suds are flying, and he is busily engaged in washing sundry motley-coloured bales which are lying in a pile beside him. They are the signal-flags used to convey intelligence and warnings from station to station. His hat lies beside the telescope a little way off, and, as he lifts his head to return Lawrence's greeting, he shows a cheery, handsome face of true man-o'-war pattern such as it did one good to look at.

'Hallo, Weatherly! Getting up the family linen, eh?'

'Ay, ay, sir, leastways a-washin' o' buntin', which is summat more in my line. It's a fine dryin' day, sir, and they *do* get grimy after a bit.'

Raising his hand for the customary respectful salute, he sent a dash of soap-suds across his nose which he wiped off, nothing daunted, with a corner of the brown sack which was carefully pinned round his immaculate uniform.

'Faith, 'tis clear starchin' an' ironin' of 'em he'll be for, next,' said Pat. ''Tis a power o' trouble yez take about them rags that's only for fluttherin' in the wind afther all. Sure, who's to tell from Ballybarty whether they're clane or dirty!'

'Ay, Pat, and precious little they'd make of the signals either, in that case. Washing's not half a bad trade, after all, and, as to clear starching, jigger me if I don't undertake to get up a Sunday shirt for the captain as well as any old woman in the parish.'

'Faith, I believe ye,' murmured Pat,

with half surly admiration. 'Divil a thing ye won't thry, any way. Since ye mended the side of my wheelbarrow as illigent as Pat Rooney himself could ha' done it, tisn't I'll be the boy to say "can't" to ye.'

Ben received this compliment with quizzical *sang-froid*, and, having wrung out his last flag, began to dry his arms in the sack, whistling the while. These arms were a whole picture-gallery in themselves. Just under the shoulder of one was depicted in deep indigo a pre-Raphaelite representation of Adam and Eve, in the correct costume of the period, with an amazingly fruitful apple-tree between them, round the trunk of which was coiled a serpent of unmistakable size and venom.

Below this *chef-d'œuvre*, anchors, bracelets, the Union Jack, and a pious motto

effectually filled up every available space of a brawny limb that, if never called upon to fell an ox, had in its time served its equivalent both on duty and off; as to the latter, the broken heads of a few too confident landlubbers were wont to testify.

'Captain at home, Pat?' asked Lawrence, as the 'handy man' advanced to take his bridle.

'Yes, sir, I saw his head as I passed the parlour windy half-an-hour agone.'

Lawrence said no more, but walked slowly out of the yard towards the front, Pat treating his companion to a wink of much meaning as soon as his back was turned.

'Musha, an' if the captain *wasn't* at home, maybe Miss Ginty would do as well,' he said, with a grin, as he started the hissing and rubbing Lawrence had interrupted.

'Ay?' said Ben, after he had indulged in a silent survey of Pat's performances, which, as regarded the proportion of work to noise, were apt to an onlooker to prove decidedly disappointing. 'Ay?' he said, thoughtfully, 'is that how the wind lies? 'Taint every craft is fit to take a clipper like her in tow, now, is it?'

'Oh, faith, the Darcys are not to be sneezed at, I can tell ye! They're o' the ra'al ould stock, so they are—gintlemen born. Divil a wan o' them iver soiled his hands to make money since Kilcoran knew them, an' it's seen a dozen generations o' the name—ay, an' more. An' they're o' the right faith, too, more by token—though haythins like you don't set much count by that,' he added, in somewhat lower tone, though perfectly audible to his laughing companion, who rather liked baiting Pat when occasion offered.

'Good judges of spirits, too, Pat, if old yarns are true,' he remarked, innocently, as he hoisted his wet bundle on to his shoulder, and started for the nearest drying-ground.

Pat could only shake his fist at the fluttering ribbon of his enemy's black, shiny hat as its owner vanished behind the gate-post.

'But I'll be even wid him yet, plaise the saints!' he ejaculated, piously.

Gwenda, though vaguely hearing Lawrence's step on the gravel, was only roused from her day-dreams when it suddenly ceased, and she was conscious that some one was standing below. Then she let her eyes sink half-reluctantly from their watch of the sailing ship, and started as she met his laughing gaze.

He stood looking up at her, with the

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wind lifting his brown locks as he held his hat in his hand.

'Mr. Darcy!—I did not hear you coming. How did you get here so quietly?'

'Clattered up on Curraghmore as usual, Miss Chetwynd, and have just consigned him to Pat. May I come up?'

He did not, however, wait for permission, and in a moment was at her side and holding her hand.

The greeting was a silent one. Why is there at times more eloquence in that wordless clasp of the hand than in the most carefully chosen sentences of conventionality — society's most elaborate welcome?

Yet it had not for each of our actors quite the same meaning. It meant in his case the stemming back of a torrent he dared not let loose; it was the decorous,

cold, most inadequate expression—oh, in how pitiful, starved fashion!—of a love that was growing with his life; that was becoming part and parcel of his existence, dear as his hope of heaven; binding itself with every thought of the present, every aspiration for the future. A love that because it was not assured, not yet smiled on and accepted—nay, might never be!—burned the more fiercely for its flames being repressed and stifled.

In her case the feeling was less definable. There was, in fact, a mixture of feelings working within her and refusing to take shape; an unacknowledged sense of gladness, a thrill half of pleasure, half-sad, at the sound of his voice; along with a consciousness that would not be stilled of unwisdom and fear.

Yet, as her eyes, slowly raised, were

caught and held by his, the gladness prevailed.

'You have had a delightful day for your ride,' said Gwenda. 'No doubt I may thank the frost for seeing you, as I suppose you cannot hunt.'

'Then you do not credit me with the good taste of having deliberately chosen your company in preference to fox-hunting?' he answered, with a laugh that was slightly bitter.

'Now that is really a very bad compliment;—I mean, to believe I could think so. I am not quite so vain and unreasonable.'

'There is hardly any frost,' he said; 'the sun has already disposed of it. What were you watching so intently just now as not to hear me crunch the gravel?'

She laughed.

'Well, in fact, I did hear a step, but

fancied it was either Pat or Ben Weatherly. Ben is on watch to-day, and he knocks about more than the rest. Old Coble sits and snores in the watch-house all day, and I steal his glass for hours. I wish I had borrowed Ben's now ; I should like to have a near view of that splendid ship. See, that is what I have been watching.'

'Yes, she *is* a clipper,' said Lawrence, admiringly, 'and going like a bird before the wind. What a splendid look-out you have here ! Do you know, I found myself thinking, as I looked up at you, of all the heroines — Hero — Medora — Juliet ?—no, she only looked into a garden by the way —all who had "many a restless hour outwatched each star." But somehow I could not fancy you as looking like any of them.'

Gwenda's laugh rang out merrily.

'Now that is too cruel of you,' she cried.

'First to pay me so pretty a compliment, and then to snatch it back again! So I am not fitted to pose for one of your lovely heroines, after all.'

For a moment he was silent.

'What were you looking for so intently just now?' he asked, suddenly, with seeming irrelevance.

'Looking for? I? Nothing whatever,' answered Gwenda, astonished.

'Ah, there it is, then. Each of them was looking for—waiting, and watching for—some one.'

Gwenda turned away. The tiny, scarce visible access of colour to her cheek did not escape him, though she kept her gaze steadily fixed on the passing ship as she answered,

'They had very sad endings, these same heroines of yours. I had rather, after all,

be my own obscure self, and die happily.'

'Why not rather say *live* happily? What matters how we die? And they were all happy—too happy—for Death came enviously between them and their joy.'

With his riding-whip bent behind his neck, he stood for a while silent, his eyes too following the rapidly lessening speck on the dazzling arc of blue.

'After all,' he said, as if continuing aloud some train of thought, 'A 1 clipper as she seems, she is but a cockleshell at the mercy of the winds and waves—like us all.'

'No—oh, no!' cried Gwenda. 'To me there is something grand in the faith and power that sends that beautiful white thing out into the great waste of waters —*not* at their mercy, but guided over them by the strong hand at the helm. She will

reach her haven and fulfil her mission.'

He gave a short laugh as he flicked an infinitesimal piece of moss from the wall.

'No doubt we look at many things in different lights, you and I,' he said, somewhat bitterly. 'Once—when I was a sanguine young idiot in my teens—I thought life was like that wonderful garden in the story-book, where you had only to put out your hand and pluck the jewelled fruits off the trees. I know better now. I know that, if any lie within such easy reach, they prove to be Dead-Sea apples when we taste them. And I know that the desire of your heart, the jewel that you feel can alone give light and lustre and sweetness to life, hangs so far out of reach that you turn away in despair.'

'You are quoting Æsop now,' said Gwenda, laughing; 'you are in a classical vein to-day. But don't forget the moral of your tale. Indeed, there is a good one to both your stories. "Do not waste time over the unattainable;" and yet "Be assured that life has gifts for all who worthily seek them." I wonder,' she said, as her eyes roved thoughtfully over the green landscape, 'why we women seem to have been given by nature more hopefulness—more belief in things working themselves right in the end, if we only are true to ourselves—true to our best promptings—after all, it is there the secret lies! We have been given more of this faith than you, and yet we are so weak—how can we use it?'

'By holding out the light for us poor, groping wanderers, who would otherwise

perish miserably in the slough of despond,' he answered, drawing closer to her. 'What would we be without you? It is you who have all the courage—we are arrant cowards till the brute is roused in us. It is lucky that nature has not given you strength of limb and muscle—poor gifts as they are.'

'I should not have cared to be an Amazon,' laughed Gwenda, 'I should, I am certain, have been rash and unlucky, and I would never have acknowledged myself beaten.'

A fine gleam of self-reliance flashed in her eyes as she spoke. He gazed at her with passionate admiration.

'You would never be beaten. You would fight "for God and the right," while we—well, most probably we should be on the side of Lucifer and his angels;

we always are. And those gifts you speak of that life has in store for its good children—what if they have utterly lost their savour, all but the unattainable one, the bunch of grapes that hangs too high?' he said, with a ring of strange earnestness in his voice.

She laughed a little constrainedly.

'It would be wiser to pronounce them sour, like the fox. But if I still hankered after them I should—look about for a ladder.'

Like lightning was the flash of gladness that lit up his face as she spoke, and a vexed feeling took hold of her. How thoughtless and silly was this playing with fire, this coquetting in metaphors.

She was angry with him, angry still more with herself. With the strong-hold of her proud self-reliance, her calm, critical

judgment, was some traitor already tampering; were recreant fingers secretly withdrawing the bolts; were the gates trembling to open?

She could not fathom her own feelings. She would have sworn yesterday—to-day—an hour ago—that he was nothing to her; that his reckless, head-strong disposition filled her with apprehension and distrust; that his faults were as apparent to her as the motes in the sunbeams, and as many; and that his liking for her—love, if he chose to call it so—was as unreliable as his character, the mere passing fancy of a spoilt child.

And yet,—when he leaned towards her with that bright new light of hope in his eyes, when his hand touched her clasped ones and she felt how it trembled,—she wavered; that inner sight, that was used

to be so brave and true one might let it guide him blindfold, for a moment was obscured by a strange, misty radiance,—unreal, glamorous, yet wildly sweet. She knew it was but the lantern-gleam of an ignis fatuus, but for the moment it shone more sweetly than the stars.

The wind caught the light gossamer web of her shawl, and would have whirled it away but that he grasped it as it touched his face. He secretly pressed the fleecy folds to his lips ere he stooped to wrap it again round the gold-flecked head and soft bare throat; lingering over the task as only a lover knows how. The breeze had been growing in strength, and clamorously objected to give up its prey. There was no pin or brooch to hold the shawl, and his arm, that was at first but temporarily offered, remained a necessary protec-

tion as the gusts grew wilder and more frequent. It encircled her so lightly that she was but half aware of the action, and, in that new misty dreamland into which she seemed to have strayed, she forgot to think whether it ought to be there or not.

There was something ominous in the silence that had fallen between them. When there comes a hush intense and breathless—a strange, awe-inspiring pause in nature's busy round, so that her great heart seems to have ceased to beat—we look for the swift, sharp flash that deals death.

He felt that she trembled. Oh, that he might interpret it as his heart prompted!

With a sudden impulse, he leaned forward and looked full into her eyes.

By what favouring freak is it that the

sun-god's beauteous mould is still left to us intact—divine—in that misty island of sorrow, that epitome at once of everything squalid and hopeless, brilliant and mirthful, blended together like strands in a rope?

Side by side with the miserable, low-browed, half-animal type too generally accepted as universal, there is a race of strangest contrast, graceful and strong of form, refined in feature, fit models for the young Antinous. Whence or how they have been developed is a question not easily answered. When the brave Don Juan D'Aquila stormed and took the quaint old southern town, did some of his handsome followers in their turn fall captive and stay behind in willing bondage to the charm of the maidens with sea-blue eyes, and dark hair, and complexion like the young wild rose?

The tradition at any rate exists, and is a reasonable enough explanation of this glorious mixture of southern fire and insular softness in faces and forms that, standing out as they do conspicuous, opposite in every characteristic to the baser crowd, are—æsthetically, at least, if the eye may not claim to probe deeper—as Hyperion to a satyr, Ferdinand to Caliban. And nature, divinely lavish, gives them still a further boon: a tongue that, as they themselves express it, 'would charm a bird off the tree.'

Oh, this strange gift of beauty—what a mystery it is! Who denies the truth of the adage, ''tis but skin deep'? But let Venus forget to draw her mosquito curtains or Apollo show up after a round with Mars: they may fling their diadems

to the Gorgons ; Olympus knows them no more.

Lawrence Darcy, while far from being a coxcomb, was sufficiently conscious of his good looks in a careless, thankless fashion, almost accepting them as a birthright ; for the Darcys from father to son were as certain to be handsome as reckless and improvident—no uncommon description of the youth of the period.

It was then such eyes of fire, such lips of exquisite curve, at once haughty and sweet, such a brow shaded by the crisp, short curls the Greeks loved, that met Gwenda's gaze as she stood motionless,—held, as it seemed to her, by some spell uncanny as witchcraft.

A sea-gull darted past them with a startled scream. It had suddenly discov-

ered that they were alive, and most probably lurking enemies.

She could not have told whether they were minutes or seconds in which they stood thus, her eyes gradually sinking under the fringe of their lids, his never wavering, searching eagerly for some faint token that would bid him hope and nerve him to test his fate for once and all.

'Good heavens!' he thought, 'did this girl, with her calm face half-averted, full of gentle shyness and sweet surprise—did she even faintly dream of the power she had over him?'

How white and cold and still they can remain, these beautiful statues of ice, that, with the fires of Gehenna beside them, scarce reflect even the glow of their flames!

And this homage of wild worship, this burning sacrifice of a man's very soul and

life, are they even conscious of it—does it touch or move them any more than it would the painted idol before which men maim and cut themselves with knives, in the maniac frenzy of a terrible super stition?

What god-like eloquence could he invoke to wake her from this rigid, dreamless sleep?

Oh, for the magic music to break a way for him through the circling thickets, and wake the echoes in the enchanted palace; to open the beautiful still eyes, and show *him* to her—kneeling, expectant—not indeed a prince, but her slave!

As he looked, with all his soul in his eyes, at the exquisite curve of lip and chin, the clear brow unfurrowed by any thought of the world's care and discord, a vague wondering hopelessness arose in

him. How was he to find words or courage to reveal to her even a glimpse of the raging fierceness of his love, the love that was seething in his breast like a very volcano?

Down there on the shore the little white pebbles made sweet, dreamful music;—what did they know of despair and death, though the dirges of the waves rang over their heads ceaselessly?

What Lawrence had been as a child he was now as a man. Seldom thwarted in any caprice, however unreasonable, because of the tempest of passion opposition aroused, the pampered self-will of the boy had grown with the growth of the man.

Whether—heaven only knows—if the gentle mother at whose knee he learned to lisp a prayer not quite forgotten yet—

whose smile and voice still came to him dimly out of the far-off past—if she had lived long enough to lead his wayward steps even a little way beside her, the goodly flower and fruitage of her planting might have spread forth and outgrown the thorns and tares in his nature—heaven only knows!

There is something that grasps the soul like a griffin's claw in the thought that there is for each one of us—blindly unconscious—the child playing on the cockatrice' den—a supreme moment when the balance trembles like the needle in the compass. Whether, for all eternity, is it to be—angel or devil? The floating speck of thistle-down decides.

Vaguely, despairingly, some such thoughts were floating like shadows across his brain. He needed no enchanted mirror

to show him the *thing* that he would become, as surely as the leaves turn yellow and rot, should she, the loadstone that drew him, the star that alone had power to guide his steps from murky depths of self-abasement to paths of honour and light and life, fail him even now.

He hardly knew that he was holding her hands in a grip like a vice, that he was suddenly speaking with wild, passionate appeal.

'Gwenda, you *must* know it!—you *must* listen while I tell you how I love you! Don't turn away, for God's sake! Don't shut your heart to me unheard! You would not if I were a beggar crying to you for a crust—a dog who came starving to your door. What better am I, indeed, who am starving—starving for one look, one word from you of hope? Oh, Gwenda,

you have me in your hands to make or mar! Do with me what you will—only love me, my dearest, love me a little, in return for every pulse of my heart, every thought of my soul!'

His wild words pierced her heart with sharp pain as from a dagger-thrust. Almost she felt persuaded that here before her, in actual shape, was her life's purpose and duty. What was she or her life's trivial happiness in comparison with a human soul?

It seemed to her that she was standing on the shore, watching the struggles of a drowning man. It might be that if she stretched forth her hand she too would be drawn into certain death—yet was it not a dastard's deed to refuse? With no poor gleam of vanity, but in all womanly acceptance of the unwelcome truth, she saw

that he had chosen to make her—only a little less erring than himself—the arbiter of his destiny. If she but held out her hand, she might lead him surely and safely into the paths of peace. Dared she, in the sight of heaven, refuse the office?

Oh, to many and many a gentle heart has this cruel question risen like a ghost from the grave; many a young girl has wrestled with it while the blinding mists enfolded it and the quicksands lay in wait for the trembling foot that no blessed ray of Heaven's light was sent to guide.

Gwenda drew her hands away with an effort, and her face drooped into them.

'Oh,' she cried, 'do not—do not make it so hard for me! I cannot say what

you would have me. It is all so sudden! Oh, why cannot we remain friends as we have always been?'

'Why cannot *we* be *friends?*' he repeated, his voice, though low and restrained, full of passionate bitterness. 'Why? Even a girl such as you, sleeping beauty as you are, must know that friendship and love have no more affinity than water and fire!'

And then, as she stood grieved and silent, his tone changed to softest tenderness, and he lifted her passive hand to his lips.

'Gwenda, my darling, my love! I know there is no one else—I know that I am the first who has had the blessed privilege of holding this little hand—of breathing words of love into your ear. Heavens! if I thought otherwise, if it were that your

heart were already given away from me—'

'Oh, no—oh, no,' cried Gwenda. 'You know what my life is, and all that is in it. There is no one else.'

Her eyes as she lifted them, with tears that would not be repressed glittering on their lashes, were wells of truth. But he knew it already. She was as much isolated up here in this wind-battered tower as the princess of the spindles in her enchanted castle. Yes, the triumph of the thought made his heart beat wildly. With her hands still pressed within his own, he gazed in silence at the heavy fringes of her downcast eyes. The deepened bloom on her cheek, the soft distressful tremor of her lip, did not escape him; hope, drawing in glad new life like a new-born babe, took note of it all; a smile softened his lips like sunlight from a cloud.

'Darling, you are my own mountain daisy; mine only, mine to keep and cherish next my heart! It will be for me that your sweet eyes will open when the light of love shines full on them. Gwenda, Gwenda—wake—now, now!'

He would have drawn her closer as his head bent above her till his lips touched her hair.

But the trance that had held her till now was slowly breaking; the mist was rolling away from her spirit's inward sight. Where had she been till now? Like bonny Kilmeny, the fairies had taken possession of her. She had been in the land 'where the rain never fell and the wind never blew,' the land of spell and gramerie. But now, at last, she had come home.

She drew her hands away with swift

decision, and moving back a little looked full into his eyes. There was something in her face that was new to it. He did not dare make further movement till she spoke.

Her voice trembled a little; and yet it had resolution in it, and truth—and pity.

'Mr. Darcy, it would be wrong, it would be very cruel and heartless,'—her breath was coming in such quick gasps that she had to pause; 'were I to say one single word that might lead you to retain a hope which I am sure—quite, quite sure—will never be realized. I cannot care for you in the way that you—you say you do for me.'

'Ah, no! nor do I dream it! But—you cannot be so cold. Good heavens! even an icicle glows into life when the sun

gleams on it! You cannot look on and see me tortured in this inferno of suspense, from day to day living only on the hope of a word or a sign that never comes; you cannot, now, knowingly refuse me one sweet word of comfort. Think, Gwenda! There is nothing beneath heaven so high that I would not strive for it, though death were to claim me as I laid the prize at your feet, had I the blessed knowledge that you loved me! And—nothing in blackest depths of despair I might not sink to—wanting it!'

Gwenda was very pale, even to her lips, and her hand went to her throat with a movement of physical distress.

'It is unfair—it is unjust,' she said, indignantly, 'to put it in such a light! To make me feel responsible for you and your life; and to try to influence me by this

feeling so that I should give up my own individuality and free-will at your bidding! I think, Mr. Darcy, your own better nature will tell you it is asking too much.'

The colour mounted hotly to his brow.

'God help me,' he said 'Love makes me abject. I would kneel here in the dust till I stiffened to clay for one sweet whisper of hope—one word that would cost you but a breath, would give me life—heaven itself!'

'It would cost me—my self-respect,' answered Gwenda, 'for it would be at the expense of truth. Oh, you would indeed have the right to call me heartless and cruel were I to lead you by word or look to think it possible I might think differently by and by—at any time—from what

I do now. Perhaps it is that I *am* cold as you say—perhaps my heart is so bound up with that of my dear father that, as long as I have him to cherish and care for, nothing—no one else—can be much to me. Mr. Darcy, forgive me, and let us end this.'

Suffering as he was from the crushing sense of loss and disappointment,—the bitter misery of the wretch who wakes from wanderings by cool streams that gleam with the gold of the dawn; from hearing the whisper of the reeds and the chirp of the waking birds, and finds the executioner, grimly waiting at his side—the herald of a keeper more grim,—he saw that she too suffered keenly.

The sweet rose-bloom had faded from her cheek, and, with her hand resting on the parapet as if to steady herself, she

stood with drooping head and quivering lips. It might have been Galatea, weary of life's hollowness and sorrow, at the moment when she seeks rest and peace again in the marble that gave her birth.

He clenched his hands, and a sigh that was half a groan escaped him. His eyes wandered aimlessly over sea and land and sky as though seeing and yet seeing them not. It was as if wondering whether there were anything left in life—was the sun still shining—were all these things still gracious and beautiful for eyes that were not seared like his?'

They do not love lightly, these sons of a storm-swept land. There may be truth in the scoff that the fever, however fierce, will burn itself out like the dried grass in the prairie fire. But it carries devastation with it. And they take the fever badly.

He turned away in a blind fashion, went down one step, and turned back. Then, as if not trusting himself—or indeed unable—to speak, he lifted her passive hand, held it to his lips for one brief, passionate moment, and was gone.

And Gwenda leaned her arms upon the wall where she stood, and, letting her head fall upon them, wept as she had never done before in all her brief sunny life.

Ben Weatherly, calmly surveying the prospect, with his glass under his arm, and his hat making a nimbus round his wind-winnowed locks, stared to see Lawrence mount and gallop down the avenue as if fiends were pursuing him.

'Hil—lo!' he ejaculated, finishing up with an expressive whistle. 'Shiver my

timbers, if he ain't got among the breakers! *He's* had his burgoo too hot—*he* has! Poor chap! I've got a kind o' a feller feelin' for him too. When Sally Lightfoot threw me over for that lantern-jawed rocket-stick of a marine—— Ah, well, bygones is best to be bygones—and there's a pretty girl in every port. But,' he muttered, nodding his head sagely, ' I'm blowed if I don't think it's a good job. 'Tisn't every lubber that is fit to command a frigate like the captain's daughter. No. Scuttle me, though, if I know the man anywheers that I would hand up her flag to!'

CHAPTER III.

JOLLY COMPANIONS EVERY ONE.

Lieutenant—or, as he was by courtesy dubbed, Captain—Chetwynd was, at the time we write of, but one of the many living instances of how a grateful country rewarded its best and bravest in those merry days when we trailed our coat metaphorically up and down the little silver streak; when 'Boney' was a name to frighten restless babes to silence; and we filled our prisons with poor, jabbering, shrugging Johnny Crapauds as we might throw rats into a cage, and starved and

stifled them with equal equanimity. We had it pretty well our own way then, and we showed what a big, blustering tyrant John Bull could be, until some one grew strong enough to snatch the whip from his hand and lay it with salutary effect on his own brawny shoulders.

George Chetwynd, at the mature age of eleven, with the tears scarce dry upon his cheeks, and his mother's kiss fresh upon his lips, found himself emancipated from the rose-covered cottage in Cornwall, that had watched his infant dreams, to the heaving, rolling depths of one of our stanchest wooden walls; depths where the mere memory of a rose was as a swift bright gleam of Paradise. Emancipated; from soft, white-curtained bed and loving arms; from respectful attendance of ancient servitors; from 'books and work,' (in the

shape of Latin and the rule of three), and 'healthful play,' to the dignity of a cocked hat and dirk, and the responsibility of a commission in His Majesty's navy as a full-blown midshipman.

And, now that John Bull has grown compunctious and pitiful even to the beasts that perish, what does he know of the miseries that racked those childish breasts in the brave old days of our supremacy; of the impossible tasks set for infant hands, and the consequent mast-headings for inevitable failure; of the hours when the numbed and starving child clung, scarce consciously, to the swinging mast, with his young eyes strained longingly, hopelessly, to the far-off horizon, the point beyond which lay home, and peace, and love. Forgotten as often as not by his careless task-master, if

he did fall like a smoked-out wasp from his giddy perch, who was responsible, who cared?

But, according to the law of the survival of the fittest, he might in time become a Nelson or a Rodney—if he only had influence! If he only could muster an uncle or a grandfather, or even thirty-third cousin with a handle to his name, or a decent fortune at his back. Otherwise, his grateful country could not possibly take note of the trifle of blood he had lost, or the number of limbs he had parted with for her sake.

And so it came to pass that there were midshipmen of mature years, men who had grown gaunt and hollow-eyed looking for that promotion 'which cometh neither from the east nor from the west.'

George Chetwynd had been in many a sharp tussle with the French, many a hand-to-hand boarding, many a cutting-out. He had had his share of wounds, and narrowly escaped being fitted with a timber substitute for his own shapely leg; an escape owed solely to the fact of the surgeon's hands being too full to attend to all the wounded, and to the rough skill of a comrade who bandaged and set the fractured member in a make-shift but unexpectedly successful manner.

He had joined his ship in the year when Nelson was fighting his last battles; he had helped to convoy the Corsican ogre to his last dreary kingdom, the melancholy rock where the chained eagle ate his heart out, sad and sick and lonely, forgotten even by the wife of his bosom. He, George Chetwynd, had trod the deck

when it was slippery with the blood of himself and his comrades; he had stood by the guns till his face was black as that of the nigger cook, and his ears were deafened by their roar; shot flying like hail; Death gathering in his grim harvest amid smoke and fire and carnage.

Ay, and with a mightier force still had he done battle; with Nature, when her legions were abroad, exultant and ruthless. When the ploughing, groaning ship fell back quivering from the blow of wave following wave, that hissing and curling hung each its one terrible fateful moment, threatening doom, ere breaking with a sound that was like the laugh of demons in its cruelty, so clamant of prey, so deaf to mercy.

There is no experience that so rouses the soul in a man, that so wakes up the

God-given part of him, as this terrible hand-to-hand conflict with the elements; when in that horror of great darkness, sea and sky alike one vast abyss of inky blackness, he feels the frail thing made with hands shudder and reel beneath him; he hears the shrieks of all the doomed souls that night will claim, wailing through the cordage; while the lightning's fitful mockery discloses a thousand yawning graves in the seething waters that press and rage to get at him.

It eliminates the clod; it develops the man. For 'they that go down to the sea in ships, and see His wonders upon the deep,' have looked Death in the eyes so often that, though they fear him not, the rustle of his wing is ever in their ears. Loving life as they love the glad light of sunrise that wakes the gold in summer

seas, they know how to face the breaker and the gale; they know, too, how brave men should meet the summons when the grim boatswain 'pipes all hands aloft.'

And when at last the captive bird, be he eagle or hawk, which so long had kept our dove-cots in a flutter, starved, stoned, galled with the weight of triple chains, pined and died there on the arid rock where we had bound him, brooding peace settled down upon us, and a grateful country began to distribute its awards to those who had so well served it.

George Chetwynd had not even a thirty-third cousin in the peerage, albeit, he came of a good old family, poor and proud. He had never sought even bowing acquaintance with a lord; millionaires were as far from him as the golden ball of St.

Paul's. He was first given command of a revenue cruiser, in those days by no means a sinecure; and after some years of service as hard and trying as any that had gone before, having succumbed to the shy sweet glance of a lovely Irish girl, he married, and applying for his present berth had settled down at last on shore.

Not for long, alas! to enjoy the happiness that so tardily had come to him. She died, and Gwenda, the motherless bairn, took her place. Gwenda with all her mother's beauty, and something of her English father's proud reserve.

The next day rose clear and cold—the day that followed Gwenda's first saddening glimpse of 'where the brook and river meet.'

Her night had been restless and vision-

haunted. She felt she must shake off the depression that seemed closing in upon her like the baneful vapours of a marsh. Her father must not notice it, the dear father whose sunlight she was, whose eyes reflected every passing cloud in her own.

And then she remembered that this was to be a day of jollification—the messmates' meeting. From east and west, from such points as were within accessible driving or riding distance, there were wont to assemble now and again at Captain Chetwynd's invitation certain of his old cronies who, having some of them served with him in the midshipman's mess, were now like himself drawn up for good, hulks sea-worthy still, but their occupation gone; nothing expected of them now but to lie supine in sheltered coves, and let the sand drift

through their port-holes, as through the eyeless sockets of the dead.

So they themselves put it after the grog had grown low in the fourth tumbler or so. But when word was brought of a rich landing, or a suspicious blue curl tried to make its surreptitious way heavenward among the hills, the light in the eyes, that fifty years' salt spray had failed to dim, proclaimed 'life in the old dog yet.'

Gwenda had therefore a busy day before her, and was glad of it. Having had a quick walk in the frosty air, she was able to meet her father at breakfast with glowing cheeks and the smile he loved and looked for.

'The captain,' as he was invariably called,—as if in reproach of the powers which had left him, alas! still in the limbo of lieutenantship,—was a handsome, largely-

made man of some fifty years. His white hair contrasted strangely with very black eyebrows, and eyes of unusual brightness. He held himself erect, and his voice was still strong and far-reaching enough to hail the maintop as in days of yore. His cheek was still fresh and youthful; his smile was sweet and ready; only the eyes betrayed the secret of a grief lived down and silenced—not dead.

After breakfast, the captain settled down to his 'log,' as he chose to call the journal which it was a part of his duty to keep, and Gwenda withdrew to make her preparations for the little dinner-party. No one but she could be trusted to make such a jam-roll as old Boyster loved, or the more delicate cream that pleased Keppel and Traynor—each of these to be introduced to the reader by-and-by.

She had to drill Nellie, too, in the proprieties of the table. Nellie was, unluckily, prone to laughter—tickled with the smallest feather of a joke. She quite dreaded having to wait on old Boyster, whose lightest word either caused an explosion of agonized mirth, or a saving rush into the kitchen with half her apron and a whole dinner-napkin in her throat; only to be rescued from immediate suffocation by the presence of mind of Peggy the cook, who emptied a pitcher fresh from the well over her head, regardless of a cap and cherry ribbons new for the occasion.

'Oh, may the saints direct me, Miss Gwenda! What in the world will I do if Captain Boysther tells the story of himself an' the praste's ould cow? Sure, I think I can see him on the top bar o' the gate, an' him roarin' murther, an' the cow makin'

afther him on three legs—the poor ould broken-winded crathur! Oh, blessed hour—I'll dhrop the very minit he begins it!'

'Och, Nellie, Nellie, have sinse, I tell ye!' cried the more sedate Peggy, as Nellie went off into wild paroxysms of laughter that Gwenda secretly joined in.

'Ye'll give him plenty o' jam, miss? He likes it. An' Misther Thraynor took two helpin's o' the lemon-jelly last time, so he did. Poor gintleman, I'd rather see him taken' somethin' that ud put a little fat on his bones, so I would—not manin' any disrespect, miss, aither—far from it, indeed!'

Peggy scolded, and Nellie flew to rub up the quaint Queen Anne teapot and cream-jug which made their appearance

on these occasions of state—relics of the Chetwynds' better days.

At last, as the wintry evening drew on to dark, and the goose at the fire began to assume its last perfect glow of golden brown under Peggy's careful hands—'Musha, ye're bastin' it as if it was a sowl in purgatory,' was Nellie's contemptuous grumble, when she failed to gain Peggy's attention to her quips and cranks—the crunch of wheels was heard on the gravel, and immediately after a sound as of a mad bull roaring through a speaking-trumpet left no doubt on the mind of any of the listeners as to the identity of the first arrival.

'Ahoy there! ahoy—y—y! Paddy, you lubber, where are ye? Ahoy—y. Turn out, ye old sack o' potatoes! Here,' as Pat appears, grinning and pulling his

forelock, 'take the old mare into port, and don't give her too much grog—I mean oats—or she'll kick the shandrydan to pieces when we're going home. Hey, Chetwynd, my hearty, how goes it? Fresh as a daisy, by George! yet,—you d——d inconsiderate young scoundrel; you make me feel like your grandfather. And there's my little sweetheart, too. You ain't going to cheat me out o' my kiss now—blest if I won't have to get a ladder to do it, though, if you go on growing like this;' and Gwenda had to submit to the hearty smack which was an institution since the days when he had carried her an infant on his shoulder.

While Gwenda and her father were laughingly unrolling the little fat, purple-faced man from a perfect mummy swathe of red comforter, an outside car made

its appearance, driven by a tall, rather solemn-looking man, who was at once hailed as Traynor, and welcomed accordingly. A small, equally solemn-looking groom occupied the other seat, and, on his master's alighting, drove the car round without a word to the stable-yard.

Close behind these again came Keppel, mild, quiet, polished, not so much a sailor as a gentleman of the old school. His man and dog-cart also retired to the hospitable regions behind, and the little party, now complete, drew round the glowing turf fire in the tiny drawing-room, and, while comparing notes of their various experiences since last meeting, took satisfactory cognizance of the fragrant whiffs that proclaimed dinner on its way.

Not many minutes indeed had they to wait ere Nellie, in best bib and tucker,

made the welcome announcement. Then Keppel, with his courtly bow and smile, gave his arm to Gwenda, a proceeding that drew from Boyster much show of wrath and disappointment. Women, he vowed, were deceivers ever; Gwenda in particular was a jilt and a heartless coquette thus to throw him over. He vowed vengeance on Keppel of the direst, and even went the length of giving him his choice of pistols or ship's cutlasses in the mast-yard at daybreak, taking care, however, like Bottom the weaver, to let the ladies know it was all a joke by executing an elaborate wink on the side next Gwenda, which threw Nellie into such agonies of solemnity as to rattle the spoon in the dish she was handing, like castanets in a fandango.

Seated thus round the same board, the

old messmates made a diverse and characteristic group.

Boyster, facing his host, had a curious resemblance to a lobster parboiled. His complexion was of a purply red, the eyes round and prominent, and features scarcely discernible in the rolls and creases of cheek and chin.

Traynor, his perfect antithesis, was tall, thin, and melancholy. He smiled but rarely, but when he did the light it threw into his solemn face was like the breaking of the sun through a cloud. He was a family man, and they all knew it was a sore struggle to feed, clothe, and educate his half-a-dozen of swift growing boys and girls, all possessed of excellent appetites, and an extraordinary capacity for driving knees and elbows through the strongest native woof.

Opposite him sat Keppel, finely featured, of handsome presence, kindly, courteous, and refined. He did not care to monopolize the talk, but when he spoke it was to leave a vein of fine gold conspicuous amidst the clay. It was understood that he was of aristocratic lineage; that, if he had chosen to avail himself of this blessed privilege only in the most ordinary and natural way, he might have been a port admiral, instead of a poor lieutenant, doing coast-guard duty. But he had kept silence, moving not a finger for his own advancement.

Life, they said, had lost its savour for him. There was a shadowy, half-forgotten story, a halo of romance, connected with his past; something that seemed to explain the far-away, dreamy sadness in his eyes, that made his voice more gentle, his smile

more sweet. No one knew more than the dimmest outline of this story; no one ventured even to speculate upon it. They respected the silence of the darkened chamber; they made no sign, asked no question. But not the less were friendly eyes quick to note and sympathize when some inadvertent passing breath set the strained heart-strings quivering.

Gwenda sat beside him. While old Boyster told stories and cracked jokes, with stentorian voice and peals of laughter that made the glasses ring, they talked in quiet, friendly way together. There was to Gwenda something very restful and pleasing in listening to the refined, earnest voice of her neighbour, in gathering from him new and striking views, noting the breadth and intelligence of his thought, the evidence of culture and taste so spar-

ingly revealed. There was a bond of sympathy between them that made the same discordant note jar equally upon the ear of each—the woman's natural delicacy, the man's nice perception and habit of thought. This note was struck at times whilst old Boyster talked.

How the little fat man laughed and wheezed and laughed again!

'By George, I never will forget that drawer full of mice!' he chuckled. 'We'd saved 'em up for days, and the *battue* was to come off when the first lieutenant was safe at dinner. He was such a regular spoil-sport that, if he'd smelt it out, he'd have found ways of cheating us of our fun, I promise you. Every man-jack of us had a stick, and when the drawer was opened—phew! out flew the mice, and round and round we went, basting away

like mad; when crack! somebody knocked over the dips. Dark or light, the mice were squealing and running here and there—bang goes somebody's shins—crack, bang over the sconce for another. The row is so deafening, what with shouting and beating, King George himself couldn't have got a hearing, when all at once the boatswain turns up with a lantern, and, holy Moses, there stood old "Duty before Pleasure," as we called him, the first lieutenant, and we'd been basting his shins while he roared murder all through the divarshion! It took him a fortnight to give us all our turn at the masthead, and he was off duty for three days with his shins rolled in wet bandages.'

Gwenda took advantage of the peal of laughter with which he ended this one, out of a score or two of such reminiscences

which were sure to follow, to beat a retreat to the tiny, ten-feet square room, dignified by the title of drawing-room. Sitting, book in hand, by the glow of the peat-fire, she could still hear the rise and fall of the voices across the hall.

Her thoughts were disposed to stray to-night. The book sank neglected on her knee, and dreams and visions took possession of her. Yesterday her life was a calm still lake, in whose surface was mirrored only the blue of the sky, the shadows of whispering trees and bending flowers. And now, to-night, what had come to her of unrest and gloom?

Doubts, fears, presages of evil, seemed to rise like phantoms from she knew not where. For the first time she felt the mystery, the cruelty, the inscrutability of life. She gazed into the stony eyes of the

sphynx; they were turned inward; they had looked on century after century of fading glories, death and decay, and were tired.

Was there no answer to the ever-recurring weary questions? Why are we here? Why must some of us suffer bitter pain and disappointment, while the rest have pleasant days and peace? Or must we all take our share?—if tardy, the stroke yet will come—heavier, more bitter and crushing, for the long lull of security, false as the bridge of the rainbow.

The wild, passionate pleadings of Lawrence Darcy were ringing in her ears. What woman is there worthy of love whose soul has not vibrated with a storm of self-abasement—of groundless, futile compunction at this imaginary wrong sprung of the power of her beauty—the glory and

sweetness of her womanhood. With a heart overflowing with pity and tenderness she beats her breast and cries, ‘ Mea culpa!’ for, willing only to carry in her steps blessing and light, behold here has fallen her shadow !

The room she sits in is a part of the original tower, and round its seaward wall the wind surges and moans loudly, roaring too in the chimney where the glowing turf sends up occasional swift bright sparks in cheery response. It used to have a charm for her, this plaint of the wind ; but to-night there was something too real in its anguish ; it harrowed her nerves, it made her shiver.

She rose and went to the window. Drawing back the curtains she looked out, striving to distinguish some outline of familiar things in the thick darkness. But

outside was absolutely nothing but the inky blackness of a moonless night; yet full of the thousand voices of the wind, and the far-away break of the sea. With a sigh Gwenda returned to the cheery companionship of the fire.

And presently, as she stood resting her forehead against the cold mantel-piece and gazing dreamily into the red cavern below, a well-remembered sound arose from the room beyond, that drew a smile from her whether she would or no. Old Boyster had started one of his interminable songs; fine old-fashioned sea-ditties made long before Dibdin gained his laurels; sea-ballads as long as Chevy Chase, and having a rousing chorus withal that sent its hearty joviality to Gwenda's listening ear like a sudden gleam of sunshine on a wintry day.

What a voice the old sea-dog had! How

it rolled through all the silent corners of the old house with an unctuous ponderosity and depth; and how grandly the swell of the additional voices took up and carried on the fine stirring melody, bringing tears of pleasure into Gwenda's eyes as she inwardly followed its lengthy progress.

At last a thunder of applause proclaimed the finish, and then a little while after 'Auld Lang Syne' gave notice that the party was about to break up.

Nellie was on the watch for this signal to bring in her tea-tray—a form nothing would have induced her to dispense with, after spending an hour or two in making the quaint old silver shine 'like the moon on a frosty night,' as she herself phrased it.

With the opening of the dining-room

door came the rush of voices and the loud 'Ha ha' of Boyster's laugh.

'Tay is it, Nellie?'—Boyster, though only half an Irishman, could get up an excellent brogue on occasion.—'Tay! Well, now, I thought ye were a sensible girl! No, no, I'm a sober man, and I've got to take care of my nerves with a ten mile drive before me, and the old mare frisking out of her skin. Here, take hold of the end of this,' holding out the red comforter; 'now, keep on rolling it round and round as if I was a peg-top. Ye'll come to the end of it in time. There! Now, fasten the last two buttons of my coat—stoopin' doesn't agree with me since I've got a little stoutish. Gwenda, my little sweetheart, I'm shy about kissing you before so many. Don't let that deludherin Keppel cut me out when I'm far away. Jack,

you lubber, what have you been doing to the harness?'

'Och, if ye plase, sor, 'twas just a little wake thereabouts, an' I strengthened it wid a bit av a sougan.'

'A sougan!' His master, holding the lantern above his head, looked round appealingly to all present. 'By the wig o' Methusaleh, I believe the lubber would let go the Bellerophon's sheet anchor on a sougan! Now then, my hearties, good-bye all round. Keep her head well to the wind, Jack, while I climb aloft. Now give me the ropes and look alive. Hooray! off we go!'

Away rattles the gig, the lantern hanging at the shaft giving a curious, one-sided glimpse of the road, flashing on the white-washed walls of the mast-yard till the corner was turned, and they vanished into outer darkness.

Then in quieter fashion departed Traynor, and only Keppel remained, whose home lay too far away to make the return journey that night.

Perhaps among them all Keppel was the more really congenial companion to the captain. They were both readers, and thinking men. Gwenda liked to sit with her work and listen to the discussions which never became heated, never lost their friendly temperateness.

With girlish romance, looking at the clear-cut features with their somewhat haughty expression when at rest, and the finely-set head streaked thickly with grey, she pictured their guest as he must have been some score or more of years ago, handsome, brilliant, full of the fire of youth. And then unawares she fell to wondering as to the nature of that old, shadowy

story. Had *he* loved? some one who had been cold and unresponsive, and who had come into his life like a blight? Or, still worse, had she been false and fickle; unworthy of the worship of a true, faithful heart?

Nay, it were better to think that in the full sweetness of love's young dream she had been snatched from him, like the lily whose stalk is snapped in the storm. Then he would at least have one exquisite memory to fill as with a perfume the chalice of his lonely dreams.

CHAPTER IV.

CHARITY AT THE CROSS.

Their guest left them early next morning, crossing to the opposite headland by boat, where his horse and gig were signalled to meet him.

Gwenda's time was very fully occupied just then, and she was glad of it. She wished to escape the scrutiny of her father's sharp eyes; she had a lurking fear that they had detected something in her looks the day before, some disturbing element that made itself felt in the magnetic *rapport* that seemed to exist between

them; and she dreaded his questioning.

Later, when it was not all so new and startling and painful, she would tell him. But not now, when her heart-strings were yet quivering with pity and passionate self-condemnation, none the less harrowing because unfounded. Not alone did Lawrence Darcy suffer.

To-day she had to take her place at the 'Cross,' a cluster of poor hovels some half-mile off, where an empty cart-shed had been requisitioned to do duty as a soup-kitchen for the relief—how sadly inadequate, the brave workers knew too well—of the wretched people who came flocking from the fever-stricken beds of their loved ones for the scanty dole that alone stood between them and death.

It was no light service. 'The pestilence that walketh in darkness' was ever present

with his bony finger outstretched to touch the brave young lips that spoke all of comfort and hope they could frame to the gaunt spectres who stood or crouched in the grim silence of despair, awaiting their turn. Hollow-eyed, hopeless, they looked neither to right nor left; they saw nothing but the busy hands that ladled out soup and distributed bread; if they had other thought, it was for the child or the mother lying at death's door—ay, maybe dead by this!—in the reeking hovel weary miles away.

From the country residences within some six or eight miles radius, ladies came without fail day after day to take their share of the work. Gwenda, who lived nearest, could always be punctual; but to-day, even as she reached the outskirts of the eager crowd, the old hooded car-

riage of the Misses Durnford drove up. These excellent ladies looked themselves as antiquated as their equipage, yet, 'withered and wild in their attire' as they were, their hearts were as large and as full of the sweet dew of charity as at blooming sixteen.

And, as they stood shaking hands and nodding genially all round, Mary Connell walked in, a plain but sweet-featured girl, the personification of everything practical and sensible; a girl who had early realized what life was to hold for her, and faced its somewhat dreary out-look with quiet acceptance. Duty was paramount with her; looking steadfastly into its grave face, she gradually taught herself to believe that all else—the laughing lips of Pleasure—the haunting eyes of Love—were beautiful myths, alluring dreams,

exquisite phantasies, for which her world had no place. And yet she grudged them not to others; only—-they were not for her.

So here, where trouble and distress were rife, she came as naturally as the sweet air of heaven.

'Poor things! no doubt they have been waiting for hours, and yet the soup can hardly be ready. What do you think, Kitty,—may we begin to serve it out? They look so famished, God help them!' said Mary, the tears in her eyes.

Kitty, the kind-hearted, active servant of Miss Durnford, who frequently took her turn as cook, took the cover off the great iron boiler, thereby releasing a cloud of fragrant steam that must have been trying indeed to the patient watchers outside.

'Well, indeed, Miss Mary, I think we might. I got over nice an' airly this morning, an' got all a-goin', for sure, to the poor crathurs that's starvin' out there, every minit is long as a day. Oh, 'tis illigant an' sthrong, so it is.'

One by one they were called up. Old Mr. Sedley, with spectacles on nose, read first the name, and then peered over his glasses to verify the identity of each recipient. Many there were who had no place on the list at all, but none were sent empty away.

As each came and went the old gentleman inquired with a would-be judicial air into their various conditions, perversely seeking to hide under much censorial dignity the workings of a heart full of benevolence; and signally failing in the attempt.

'Molly O'Brien, ye might have sent that big son o' yours here to-day instead o' trudging all that six miles with your lame leg.'

'Oh, wirasthru, yer honor, sure, 'tis down wid the sickness he is, the Lord be about him—ravin' an' cryin' out wid the fire in his head. An' only a week since I buried my Nellie—the light o' my eyes an' the pulse o' my heart. Oh, wirasthru! wirasthru!'

Only for a moment the wretched woman gave way to the wild cry of grief. With dry, tearless eyes she took the tin and loaf that were handed her with a half-articulate word of thanks, and hurried away.

The list trembled in Mr. Sedley's hands, and something went seriously wrong with his glasses.

A small boy, in whose pinched face fun and misery seemed struggling for mastery —alas ! at heavy odds—came opportunely to the rescue.

'Pat Doolan, you young scoundrel! What do you mean by bringing a horse-bucket for the soup? Maybe 'tis a clothes-tub you'll have with you to-morrow.'

'Faith, your honour, ye're welcome to the best silver soup-terreen af I could find it. But 'twas mislaid, it was, when I was settin' out, and the bucket was standin' handy.'

From eyes that were sore with weeping a gleam of fun shot out at this sally of Pat's, and Mr. Sedley, adroitly turning a chuckle into a cough, rapped his uncapped head with his walking-stick.

'Come, come, sir, no nonsense. How

are the granny and the young ones?'

'The childer's better, your honour, but granny's down wid it now.'

'What—the fever!'

'Yis, your honour. But she's tough. She'll pull through like the rest iv us, plaze goodness,' said Pat, with exemplary piety, which a something in his dancing eyes belied.

Just then an old woman hobbled up, holding out a tin can and begging for her share in a mixture of Irish and imperfect English.

'Why, bless my soul, here she is! You young——'

But, turning to administer salutary chastisement on the mendacious little vagabond, he found the bird had flown.

Many such scenes were enacted.

The woman for whose 'dacent' burial

stray sixpences were begged with tears and lamentation turned up next day, all unconscious of the pious fraud. And for the father who lay cold in his grave the daily portion was still demanded as long as credulous benevolence could be imposed upon.

But not too straitly were the lines drawn. Pitying eyes looked past all this to where human endurance was strained on a rack scarce conceivable now. Surely Gehenna itself could hold no lower depth than that these tortured souls passed through!

A man who seemed faint with recent illness staggered in, holding over his shoulder a little child whose pinched, drawn face spoke of suffering and starvation with piteous certainty. He held out his tin can and stood waiting in silence.

Young and well-featured, he was the merest wreck now of a powerful, straight-limbed man; if he had indeed escaped from Death's clutches, it was not un-scathed.

'Ah, Mike, my man, I'm glad to see you about again,' said Mr. Sedley. 'How is the wife?'

The kind-hearted Kitty was taking the child from his arms as the old gentleman addressed him. A spasm passed over the man's face, and he threw up his arms with a sudden wild throe of agony. Turning aside to the empty window-shelf, he let his head sink upon it, while his frame shook with heavy, tearless sobs.

'What is it, alannah?' asked Kitty, awe-struck, laying her hand gently on his shoulder.

He seemed not to hear her. The wild

torrent of grief was let loose at last, and instinctively they all felt the overladen heart must have this relief unchecked. When at last he raised his head and looked dazedly round, no one asked the question his despair had answered. While the women fed and warmed the child by the fire, other eager hands proffered him food, but he pushed them aside half-unconsciously.

''Tis wake an' sick ye are, acushla. Taste jist a dhrop of the good soup now, do.'

'A bite or a sup 'ud choke me, I tell yez,' he cried, fiercely, at last. 'Give me somethin' for the child, an' let me go back to her—back to see if I can't die beside her. Oh, why—why did the fever lave me livin', and she gone—gone away from me for ivermore—Mary, my darlin', my pride, that

danced wid me three years ago at the patthern there outside at the Cross, wid cheeks like the wild rose in the hedges? Oh, my darlin', my darlin'!'

'Whist, whist, alannah! Sure, if Father Tom was here he'd tell ye 'tis prayin' ye should be now for her sowl, instead o' cryin' out agin the Lord's will. The blessed saints help ye, poor boy!' cried a poor old crone.

'Ay, prayin', prayin', ye say?—Oh, blessed Mary, didn't I pray for two days an' nights widout movin' from my knees but to give her the dhrop o' could wather she cried for—prayed for her life—ay, every pulse o' my heart, every dhrop o' sweat from my brow was a prayer—an' no one heard—no one cared! Ayeh! let Father Tom take his pathers an' his aves to them that believes in 'em!'

A shudder of horror ran through the little crowd of sympathizers, and the old women crossed themselves and uttered a pious ejaculation—feeling, however, that the wretched man's words were but the outcome of overwhelming grief, and that he would not in mercy be held accountable for them.

Gwenda had warmed a little milk, seeing the child unable to take the soup, and had fed it slowly, while warming its poor, shrivelled limbs. It could swallow but a little, and its restless eyes turned ever to its father. Soon it held out its hands with a pitiful, silent appeal to him, and he came quickly and lifted it to his shoulder. They handed him his can and some bread, and, while the crowd opened in a reverent, awe-struck way, he strode

out along the miry road without a word or a glance—a stricken creature—the dead heart going home to its dead.

By-and-by the fast trot of a horse was heard approaching, and Father Tom himself drew up at the door. He was a man well on to sixty, stout, red-cheeked, and jovial by nature. But just now he looked fagged and anxious. He stooped on the saddle, and looked in with a smile at the open door.

'Mornin' to ye ladies all! Sure, 'tis a sight for sore eyes ye are, in that ugly ould shed. How's yerself, Mr. Sedley? Busy as a bee in clover, no doubt. No, I haven't time to come in. I'm just giving the cob his wind before starting for Ballyracket, where there's three poor souls a'most gone, they tell me. Well, now, if

ye *have* a thimbleful to spare, I'll take it, and thankful, Miss Durnford, for not a bite have I had since midnight.'

Miss Durnford handed him a cup of steaming soup, which he hurriedly sipped while dealing salutations and questions to the modicum of his flock which still remained.

'Ah, Peggy Murphy, how's the old man? I'm not forgettin' the couple of old flannel shirts I promised him. Call at the house as ye pass, an' tell Mrs. Clancy I said they were in the top drawer o' the chest. Though they've as many holes in 'em as a rabbit-warren, air is wholesome any way. Pauddheen, you rascal, keep your red head further from the cob's nose—he's terrible frightened of fire. Ah!' he said, smacking his lips, as he handed back the cup, 'that's put new

life in me. I've had a bad time av it with old Casey since twelve o' the night. But he made a good end, thank the Lord, an' left a dacent sum for masses for his sowl—an' 'twill need it all, I'm thinkin'.'

The twinkle of the eye that accompanied this speech was Father Tom all over.

'It's a terrible time, the Lord knows,' he said, gathering up the reins, 'but the doctor tells me the faver's dyin' out—faith, if it is, 'tis like a spent fire when there's nothin' left to burn. But keep your hearts up, poor crathurs, for the Lord's in heaven still,' he cried, taking off his hat and looking upwards, the wind lifting his grey locks.

A hoarse and feeble attempt at a cheer followed him as he pushed his tired horse down the road.

It was incalculable the amount of good

his cheery presence brought among the poor, fainting spirits he ministered to. Untiring, self-sacrificing, zealous in administering the rites he believed in, there was a fund of honest mirth and jollity in the man's nature that, whether or not compatible with his office, was at times as medicinal at the sick-beds he visited as any doctor's stuff ever invented.

Heaven bless you, Father Tom! Your type is vanishing quickly from the land of sun and shower you helped to brighten. Gone with you are the genial faces, the ready smile, the simple faith that brought the light of heaven so near, even in the deepest terror of the storm. Gone the quips and cranks, the repartee, witty and smart, all the quainter for the rich, rolling brogue that gave it flavour. And gone with you the liberal spirit, the *camaraderie*

that made the jolly priest a right welcome guest at all tables, be they Protestant or Catholic, Whig or Tory.

'We have changed all that.' Asmodeus has breathed over all the fiery violet-coloured vapour; swords are drawn; oaths bitter and deep vex the affrighted echoes; and the tiger gleam in men's eyes is more sullen and ferocious now than when disease and starvation sat like ghouls at their hearths, and the graveyard paths were worn as with the tramp of an army.

When the last drop of soup and loaf of bread had been distributed, the ladies put on their mufflings and prepared to depart.

Mary Connell waited till Mr. Sedley had finished his little official confab with the elder Miss Durnford, and then touched his arm gently.

'I had a note from Constance Standish yesterday, Mr. Sedley. She sends me a further subscription to give you for our soup-kitchen. They are to spend Christmas, she and her father, with her aunt in Dublin as usual, but she intends to return home immediately after; and, in the meantime, I have promised to take as much as I can of her work.'

Mr. Sedley looked quizzically at her over his spectacles.

'Well, now, Miss Mary,' he said, 'I wonder how much more you think you could undertake? Why, you are the busiest man in the parish, as it is!'

'Oh,' said Mary, laughing, 'you do not know how strong I am, and what a dangerous amount of energy I have to dispose of. Now, Gwenda, I am ready.'

The girls bade adieu to the two old

ladies whom Mr. Sedley was just then handing to their carriage with the air of a Brummel, albeit the aforesaid vehicle had seen much of the wear and tear of life like its owners, and the horses which drew it were sad-looking and in no wise rampant. In fact, waggish youth had long since yclept the equipage, 'The light of other days.'

But, as they drove away, the old ladies smiled and kissed their hands with the courtly grace of forty years back; the time when they were reigning toasts, and Mr. Sedley was a dashing young buck, and led 'hands across and down the middle,' till the cock crowed in the morn.

Parting with Mary at the top of the hill, Gwenda hastened up the avenue, knowing how her father fidgetted and watched for her, when long absent.

She found him seated in the little dining-room with his 'log' spread out before him; a big bundle of sheets having a flexible oilskin cover, which from much rolling and tying with black tape strings was given to sudden jumps, and pertinacious efforts to revert to the cylindrical form it was best used to.

The captain was busy ruling red ink lines with what neatness he could command; holding his spare pen, a formidable goose feather, across his mouth. Removing this, he looked at Gwenda over his glasses in a thoughtful way, and rumpled his grey locks with the sturdy feather.

'I don't like it,' he said at last, shaking his head, ''pon my soul, I don't. Going down there day after day among those fever-stricken creatures. And yet I know

—oh, I know, all you would say for it, my dear. We *must* help them. But, damme! if it weren't for all this messing with ink, and totting up of figures that seem invented to drive a man crazy, I would go myself, and keep you safe at home. You couldn't post up the log, I suppose now, even with Bradley's help, could you?'

'Oh, father, father,' said Gwenda, laughing, 'to turn coward now, after such a long spell of it, and just as things are beginning to mend!'

'Mend? I don't see much sign of it, yet. There, be off and change your clothes, and have them well aired. I don't like this sort of thing, 'pon my soul, I don't!'

And the captain, having made his head look like a disorderly hay-cock, ruled

several shaky lines in his ledger that had no business there whatever, thereby giving himself a good hour's extra work on the morrow.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER TOM LAYS THE DEVIL.

Everything seemed to have suffered change for Lawrence Darcy as he rode homewards on the afternoon of his meeting with Gwenda.

Alas for youth! with its passionate, wild hopes and reachings after the unattainable! Like the gourd whose ambitious tendrils shoot ever skyward, drinking in the sweet air of heaven, and the sunlight and the dew, in the fond belief that for it and it only are they made; like it, when the hail descends and fierce winds sweep the earth,

thou liest crushed and quivering, envying the lowly roots too late, though their leaves are white with dust, and every passer's foot bruises them.

He began to wonder now whether he ever had real hope of winning Gwenda. Had he not always, in her presence, a lurking sense of inferiority; something that made him cautious, slow to reveal the workings of a nature that would not bear the scrutiny of those clear, truth-compelling eyes?

Not all himself had he given her. He had kept the doors of his heart, and opened them but a little, warily, that her gentle gaze might meet only the swept and garnished chamber, with her own sweet image enthroned therein. Never should she dream of the dusty, darkened corners that lay behind it—the bitterness and wrath, out-

pourings of foolish anger against heaven and fate; the reckless pursuit of present delight; the selfish forgetfulness of even a semblance of duty.

Not that these truths came now and marshalled themselves before him with salutary sternness. Could they have done so, he were in better case. But conscience —mesmerize, strangle, kill it if we will—has a strange knack of coming to life again, and, at unexpected times, clutching us with its bony hand and clamouring to be heard. And it was its voice—weak, indeed, with much bad usage—that was muttering gloomily in his ear as he rode by the frost-tipped hedges, which the morning sun had filled with diamond light.

After the first break-neck gallop, his horse, finding his master strangely indif-

ferent, subsided into a walk, having probably his own grievances to ponder over, the stable-commissariat of late showing a distinct decadence from the princely lavishness of days of yore.

Lawrence, with his whip across his knees, let him choose his own pace. The short day was drawing to a close as they skirted the lake, a great, steely mirror on which the red flame of sunset lay like blood. The night wind was beginning to moan through the rank flags and rushes at its side.

A swan who had her nest in the furze-break came out to hiss angrily, her sudden onslaught startling the horse into a rear, which, however, he was presently ashamed of, as the swan was a pretty old acquaintance, and this little show of temper a form of greeting he had long been used to.

It had not much beauty, this lake; a refuge for slimy weeds that, year after year, grew thicker and battened on the decay of former growths, and sent up unhealthy vapours that hung like battle-smoke all along its surface, while ever the sun lay low. A melancholy, sullen sheet of water, sparsely sprinkled in summer with a water-lily or two, at the sides of the tracks which the swans laboriously tried to keep clear; but in winter dull, stagnant, and depressing, haunted with strange, moaning sounds which might be the wind in the reeds or the cries of some of its queer denizens; if not, as there was excellent authority for believing, the groans of a troubled spirit, a Darcy of days gone by, which was laid there by the family priest, after severest exercise of bell, book, and candle.

This, of course, was the popular theory; it was slightly puzzling, however, to understand why any one particular Darcy should have become entitled to so much attention after death, having all led, in about an equal degree, most unmitigatedly graceless lives.

Lawrence reined up his horse half unconsciously, and looked along the flat, marshy land to where the light was being slowly pressed out and extinguished by long, straight banks of heavy clouds. At his feet the water made an occasional gurgle as it slipped between the spears of the flags, and when the horse neighed impatiently a wild duck and her brood shot out like a miniature fleet, making marvellous speed for the opposite sheltering spur.

Here, at least, was life and motion;

'happy living things;' it were well for Lawrence if he could 'bless them unaware.' But he hardly noticed them. The gloom of the lurid sunset was reflected in his eyes as he sat letting his glance wander over the cheerless prospect; from water and reedy belt to profitless stretches of oozy land, where the snipe and the curlew sent their long, shrill cries through the mirky air, and the frogs croaked reply from below. To the left, towards the sea, lay the farm land, such as it was—worn out by years of merciless cropping and poor cultivation.

Slowly, thoughtfully, Lawrence's eyes travelled over it all—he, the last of the Darcys, and this his inheritance—and a bitter pang was at his heart.

'To save *this*,' he said to himself, 'I am to give up all;—love—Gwenda?—Tush,

she has cast me off! What does it matter now? Let the old man have his way, and sell me to the first bidder he can find. I won't be the only bad bargain he'll have on his conscience, as Clogheen fair could testify.'

He set spurs to his horse, scattering the sandy soil with dull thuds, and galloped up to the house, where, throwing the reins in silence to a stable-boy, he went in, making at once for the dining-room, where his father was pretty sure to be alone. But, as luck would have it, he formed this latter assumption too hastily.

On opening the door, Lawrence found himself in an atmosphere redolent of tobacco-smoke and rum-punch, out of a nimbus of which the rubicund visage of Father Tom Brannigan shone like the sun in a fog, as he lay back taking glorious

ease in a big chair, and blowing vigorous clouds from a yard long 'churchwarden.'

'Good luck to ye, my son!' was the salutation, with a wave of the pipe. 'Faith, ye've not grown smaller since I saw ye last, anyway. The saints be good to me, I never can remember 'tis three an' twenty years since I was at the christinin' of ye in this very room. I've never tasted a drop o' sperits, Mr. Darcy, like what you gave us that night—not disparaging present marcies aither,'—to emphasize which his reverence took a hearty pull at his tumbler *par parenthèse,*—'no, I've never tasted their aiqual since, and don't expect to ever again in *this* world.'

'Humph!' said Phil Darcy, 'your reverence should know best as to what sort of brew you're likely to get in the next. As to that brandy, it was the last of as fine a

run as ever I made on a cloudy night.'

'Ahem!' said Father Tom, and looked thoughtfully into his empty tumbler. 'They were pleasant times them an' lively, there's no denyin'. Many's the jovial chorus I've helped to swell sitting at that blessed big mahogany table, wid the gauger himself roarin' drunk on the best—hem! —*private enterprise*—brandy. He had but a wake head too, the omadhaun, to be so convarsant with all sperituous liquors by vartue of his calling. 'Twas a cruel joke o' the boys to blacken his face an' drive his wife into fits when she saw him in the mornin'.'

''Twasn't the only joke that was played that night, Father Tom,' said old Darcy, with a grin.

Father Tom tried to look unconscious for a moment or two, but the effort was

beyond him, and, throwing back his head, he roared till his fat sides shook with honest merriment, and that at his own expense.

'Well, now,' he said at last, with gasps for breath, and wiping his eyes, 'as I'm alive, I thought I had cleverly kept that to meself for these twenty years an' more, an' here I am twitted with it at last, an' before the child I christened, too!'

'Oh, don't mind *me*,' said Lawrence, throwing himself into a chair. 'I can stand a good deal with the help of rum-punch.' He had forgotten to mix any, however.

''Twas a mane thrick, my boy, to play on their own parish priest, an' me having tin long miles to dhrive of a lonely road on a dark night. Oh, the haythins—little riverince they had for their pasthor!'

'Come,' said Phil Darcy, 'let us hear the story at last. Like old port, it should taste all the better for being twenty years in bottle.'

The priest, having concocted another steaming glass, smacked his lips approvingly over it, and then shook his head.

'Moderation, my boy, moderation is a fine thing. I'm unable to deny the impachement of havin' exceeded its bounds by a tumbler or two on that particular night I spake of—but Misther Darcy knows—who betther?—the uncommon excellence of our excuse. The like o' that brandy's not to be had for money now, customs or no customs. That I'll take my davy ov! But that's not the matther in question. Well, maybe 'tis better I should make a clane breast of it before I die, seein' ye've got hould ov an end ov it, anyway.

''Twas gettin' well on to the small hours, on that same night o' your christenin', Lawrence avick, when I bethought me ov my long drive homewards, an' ould Mrs. Flannigin to be buried in the mornin'. —rest her sowl! She was a dacent woman, an' made illigant liver puddin's at Christmas. So I got up, loth enough to leave such good company—though indeed by this time the most of 'em was under the table—sent word to Barney to bring the car to the door, an', shakin' hands with as many as were standin', I got into my big frieze coat an' prepared to start.

'Wid the first glance I had of Barney, I knew he was in worse case than myself. He was standin' balancin' himself like a shock o' wheat in a gale o' wind, wid the gravest face in the world—he that was

always on the broad grin when he was sober!

'"Barney, you spalpeen," I said, "are ye fit to dhrive me home, think ye?"

'"Dhrive, is it? Faith, I'd undhertake to dhrive the Blarney coach there an' back, if 'twas naded, at onst!" says Barney, with the solemnity of a judge.

'Well, it wasn't the first time we'd gone home together afther a night's entertainment, an' I knew that the ould horse, at any rate, could be trusted, so I said,

'"Take it aisy, then, Barney, ma bouchal. Hang the lanthorn," ('twas only an ould horn one, and gave mighty poor light,) "hang the lanthorn to the off shaft, an' lave it to the baste to find his way home."

'So we set off at a quiet pace, me sittin' well muffled up on one side o' the

car, and Barney on the other houldin' the reins. The roads were in good order, an' seein' that the horse was makin' his way as careful as a Christian, I fell into a sort ov reverie, wid the bushes an' the threes noddin' at me, and me noddin' back at them in the darkness, until we came in sight o' the Crooked Cross, which, you know well, isn't the place for any man to pass afther midnight widout blessin' himself. An' as we were in the very act o' dhrivin over it, there came a yell from Barney on a suddint that brought me out o' my dhrames, I'll warrant ye, like a clap o' thunder. By raisin' o' my coat, bein' heavy an' tight-buttoned, an' the cape over my head, I was only able to slew round a little so as to get a glimpse ov him beyant me. An', glory be to goodness, he was like nothin' in the world but

a big cod-fish on a hook! for his eyes were starin' out ov his head, an' his mouth wide open, an' niver a word could he spake but point wid his finger. So I screwed myself round mighty quick, an' there—saints an' angels protect us!—there was the Ould Enemy himself sittin' between us in the well o' the car.

'Barney, to this day, is willin' to swear he was black as a coal, an' had horns like the prongs ov a pitchfork, an' a tail wid the fluke ov an anchor at the end ov id. I am not prepared to say I noticed all that, but am positive enough as to the tail and the claws, an' that his eyes shone like living fire when the light o' the lanthorn flashed on 'em.

'It's no aisy thing whin ye're just roused out o' sleep to remimber the proper form o' words needed at the moment; far

worse whin it's no less a call that's made on you than to exorcise Satan, an' that, to be most efficacious, in Latin.

'So, for a while, I was nearly as bad as Barney, though inwardly I called on all the saints in the calendar to help me. An' then by degrees the words began to come to me, an' I roared Latin at the ould Sarpint at the top o' my voice; maybe not ov the very best quality, which couldn't be expected ov the Pope himself under the carcumstances, but good enough for the divil anyway. An', indeed, it's my private belief that he doesn't understand a word ov it, an' that's the saycret of it's havin' such a hould over him. At any rate, he listened to it in respectful silence for a minute or two, as if he wor dumbfoundhered, an' then I fetched him a crack over the sconce wid the butt end o' the

whip, that—along wid the Latin—fairly finished him, an' wid an eldritch screech, fit to wake the dead, he vanished as sudden as he came, leavin' us both shakin' like two lumps o' jelly.

'I took up the reins, for Barney couldn't hould 'em for prayin', an' whipped the ould horse into the smartest gallop he ever was trated to. We didn't draw breath till we wor safe in our own stable-yard wid the gates shut. Barney couldn't lave his bed next day wid the fright.

'Well, as it happened, I had to ride the same road that afternoon to a station, an' meetin' a dacent boy o' the Caseys I stopped to ask about his mother's rheumatics, an' in the coorse ov talk he tould me of the terrible fright his father had got only that blessid mornin' wid findin' Squire

Darcy's big black monkey sittin' grinnin' at him in the barn.

'Thin light began to dawn on me! Why, in creation, hadn't I thought of that brute Jacko, that I had seen enough an' too much ov many's the time—since ever the ship captain brought him a prisint to ye from over the says?

'A purty thrick to play on me—a priest in holy ordhers—an' a purty story to have goin' the rounds o' the county!

'I revolved the matter in my mind as I rode homewards, an' it began to sthrike me that if Barney and meself kept our own counsel we might have the laugh on our own side. But, knowin' my man, I saw it would never do to thry to undecaive him. That would have been a piece of work entirely beyond me.

'So I went to his bedside as solemn as if I was sent for to anoint him, an' I talked it over wid him an' improved the occasion for the good ov his sowl. An' then I tould him if he was ever to mention to a living being his having once seen the divil he would put himself in his power here an' hereafter for evermore. Whereupon he took his solemn oath before me that never a word ov it should pass his lips to mortal man!

'An' he's kept it faithfully; though the king himself an' a regiment ov soldiers wouldn't get him within a mile o' the Crooked Cross afther sunset.

'So there's my story, an' ye're welcome to it. But many's the time I've wondhered which o' ye was at the brewin' ov it, and how the baste was got to shew himself just when he did?'

‘ ’Twas the easiest thing in life,’ answered Phil Darcy, laughing. ‘Ned Hennessy started it.’

‘Oh, divil fear him!’ interpolated the priest, ‘was there ever a bit o’ godlessness he wasn’t first in?’

‘Ned had seen the effect of a dram on Jacko, and calculated that by giving him just enough to put him to sleep for an hour or two he could be stowed away in the well of the car, and warranted to rise like a jack in the box when you were somewhere about half way. As to the Crooked Cross, that must have been a special inspiration of his own—or old Nick himself.’

‘Well, well, to think how simple it all was, afther all. ’Tis a stale joke to laugh at now, young man, and ’twas uncommon bad teachin’ to give ye on your christenin’ day.’

'I believe I was three weeks old on that interesting occasion—my morals could hardly have suffered much,' said Lawrence.

'Ah, well, a joke's a joke, an' I hope I know how to take one as well as any man. Now, what in the world kept ye so quiet about it all that time?'

'Why,' answered old Darcy, 'we were in doubt whether it hadn't utterly failed. Jacko found his way home with a broken head next day, but we knew nothing of how he had acted his part. Only to all appearance he had had the worst of it. We concluded to wait and hear the other side first. But you kept your counsel so well, there was never a word of enlightenment from that day to this.'

The priest held his sides and laughed

till he had to wipe the tears from his eyes.

'Ye were sould for once, Phil Darcy,' he cried, gasping for breath. 'Well, here's to the good old days when both ov us had a dacent handful o' hair on our heads, an' this six-foot or so of good looks, an' mischief was an innocent babby in the cradle! An' now, no doubt, 'tis a wife he'll be wantin'. Well, mathrimony's a holy institution for them that feels called to it, an' no doubt you'll make as good a husband as—as——'

'The rest of the Darcys,' put in old Phil, obligingly.

The good priest, having floundered into deep water unwittingly, took refuge in his tumbler, the eye that looked over its edge showing a comical screw nevertheless.

‘ 'Tis a rale pity to see the choice gettin' more limited every day, though. For one family ov the ould faith of manes and position now left, there's a dozen of them that Queen Bess sent over, or that came swaggerin' in wid long-nosed William, bad cess to him! Nothin' but English names now where the "Mac's" and the "O's" held their own from generation to generation, maybe one takin' a castle here, or another seizin' a bit land there, but always fightin' it out paceably among themselves an' throublin' no one, till Protestant tyranny was let loose upon 'em, an' their goods taken away, an' themselves obliged to fly like malefactors! Ochone, 'tis little use talkin' about it. But, as I was sayin', there's mighty few ov the ould faith left to ye, young man, an' for that raison it's a wondherful piece o' luck that there

should be still three beautiful colleens o' the Gallachers waitin' for the axin'—all convent-bred, illigant, accomplished crathurs. If ye wor to see the altar-cloths they've embroidered, an' the wather-colours they've painted, an' heard 'em playin' on the piannyforty! Och, your head would be clane turned! An' they'll have a nate little fortune a-piece when old Ned Gallacher goes,' added the priest, his remarks here being more expressly addressed to the older man.

Lawrence had risen impatiently and gone to the window, where, with arms folded on the sill, he remained gazing into the gathering gloom with a brow as gloomy.

'What match-makers these priests are! How neatly they fit in the points of their little plans, and expect us, their puppets,

to dance as they pull the strings ! So the reverend father has a Catholic bride ready for me, has he ? Well, what does it matter? As well a beetroot-cheeked, loud-voiced Miss Gallacher as any other. Better, perhaps—if she have no heart to break !'

Something like this were the thoughts that coursed through his brain ; lurid, lowering, as the banks of night-clouds that threw their jetty bars across the faint, pale light that was slowly dying, out there in the west.

When at last the coming darkness warned Father Tom that rum and pleasant converse must needs give way to the calls of duty, Lawrence roused himself to see him to the door.

'Good-bye, Lawrence, my son. Think of what I was sayin' to ye about them

Miss Gallachers. 'Tis all wan which o' them ye chuse—there's not one ov 'em a pin's point behind the other for beauty an' liveliness—an' they've all the same fortune! God speed ye!'

Father Tom started off at a good round trot herewith. Lawrence, looking after him, burst into a laugh that had but little of mirth in it.

He stood awhile listening to the screams of the curlews on the marsh below. How strangely the light seemed to linger, as if imprisoned in that doleful, wide waste; gliding here and there in specks over its surface, white and orange and blood-red, and yet the light in the sky had died down to the narrowest pale streak of lemon-hued purity, menaced by the ever-growing waste of densest black.

Mick, the stableman, seeing the young

master at the door, must needs have him look at 'the colt.'

''Tis a nasty scrape he's given himself thin, your honor, wid that broken gate, bad luck to it! If ye'll just step down wid me here to the field, I'll be mortal glad, for he's that frisky, the beauty, that I can't get near enough to see the scratch; let alone that he's as like as not to lift me off the ground wid his teeth, when the fun is in him.'

Lighting a cigar Lawrence resigned himself, hatless as he was, to Mick's guidance and eloquence.

'Through the farm-yard an' across the haggart is the shortest way, sorr. Mind the harrow there, Masther Lawrence! It's just to keep the cows from sthrayin' at milkin' time. Ay, ye're lookin' at the plough in the corner; 'tis jist gone to

smithereens at last. Divil another field it'll go over. It's done all that could be expected ov it, like Mat Casey's wooden leg that he cracked half the heads at the fair wid before goin' to the parish for a new one.'

'How are the cows, Mick?' asked Lawrence, as they passed the house where their whisking tails were just visible in the light of a horn lanthorn hung inside.

'Och, they're like the rest o' the world; gettin' a taste o' starvation, an' they don't like it, small blame to them!'

'Starvation! the cows! What the dickens do you mean, man?'

'Well, Misther Lawrence, you needn't look as if you'd ait me for sayin' it, but it's God's truth, an' a mortial pity, both for the poor bastes themselves, an' the loss in regard to milk. I knew it wasn't right

nor raisonable to sell field afther field o' the mangles an' turnips, though it wasn't for the likes o' me to put in my word, an' ready money's about the hardest thing I know to come at, an' a dacent price bein' offered. But, maybe, if your honor had been at home ye'd have had a say in the matther, an' indeed there's a dale that's needin' lookin' to, now that you're back. For we don't like to throuble the ould masther wid him bein' frail an' short in the temper——'

Here Mick's voice sank cautiously, and he glanced over his shoulder as if half afraid of encountering the fierce eye of the 'ould masther' beneath which he was wont to quail.

Laurence stalked gloomily on, enduring yet more of these pleasant revelations at every step.

'The hay'll be finished before Aister. 'Twas the poorest crop iver we dhrew. So was the oats for that matther, not the length o' your hand o' sthraw, an' a deal o' smut in the ear. I'm makin' beds o' bog rushes for the horses since Michaelmas, an' they're hard enough to get too. But the Lord will mend the times yet, plaise goodness.'

More than the times were out of joint under Mick's lieutenantship; probably he expected a special interposition of Providence to set the gates on their hinges and mend their broken spars, for he piously refrained from any officious meddling with their present deplorable condition. But the infinite trouble it cost him to devise lame and inefficient substitutes; the painful carrying from a distance of broken ladders, wheel-less carts, and up-rooted furze

bushes; the ingenuity and lavish regardlessness of time with which these were piled one upon another to form barricades, of formidable dimensions and unsightliness,—all this was only to be exceeded by the masterly intelligence shown by cow, horse, and pig, in discovering the exact weak spot in the erection, and making triumphant entry by it to the delectable land beyond.

'Wait a bit now, your honor, till I take down the ladder. Sure, it was wid this very spike o' the gate the baste scraped his showlder—thought to get out for a mornin' walk, the crathur! Here he comes now! Mother o' Moses, sorr, take a stick in your hand!'

With mane flying, and tail erect, the beautiful animal came looming down on them in the twilight. Mick had reason-

able excuse for trepidation, for in playful mood the colt was given to use teeth and heels in a way that, like the dig in the ribs which our funny friends would have us accept in the strictly jovial and amicable vein that prompts its administration — which we seldom do—could have been better honoured in the breach than the observance.

But, as Lawrence walked calmly towards it, the animal changed its bounding gallop into a trot, and with a whinny of recognition came sidling up and allowed him to catch it firmly by the mane and stroke its fine head and talk to it. The movement of the ears and nostrils showed the high-bred, nervous restlessness of its strain—the lifting of a finger would have sent it rearing and snorting out of sight and reach for that night at any rate.

It had learned to look upon Lawrence's cigar as a part of himself, but always under protest, and it arched its neck and sniffed at it now with quite a fine-lady air of disgust and amazement.

'It's too dark to see the scrape,' said Lawrence. 'Could you manage to light the lantern without scaring the colt away?'

Mick retreated behind the barricade, and, after much scraping of matches and mixed mutterings to powers benign and otherwise, succeeded in producing a foggy glow that represented light in the days of horn lanthorns. Then, very gingerly, and with lively remembrance of having once hung suspended by the small clothes for the space of forty-five seconds in the teeth of this same playful animal till

rescued by his young master, Mick approached.

'Steady, now, steady, lad,' said Lawrence, as the colt threw up his head and gazed excitedly at Mick's impromptu representation of 'the man in the moon'; lanthorn in one hand, furze-bush in the other. 'Put down that bush, man, and don't wobble the lantern. There, keep behind me if you like, only stay quiet.'

'Oh, sweet Saint Bridget, an' Saint Pathrick, an' all the holy possles! Keep a hoult of him, Masther Lawrence dear! The sight o' cordhroys is enough for him —the spite he has agin 'em! Maybe ye'd take the lanthorn in your hand yerself, sorr—ye'll see the betther.'

'Here, give it to me!' said Lawrence,

keeping fast hold of the colt's mane while he examined its shoulder. 'Pshaw! it's the merest scratch this, and healed already. But you did right to tell me of it, all the same, Mick.'

'Oh, faith, 'tisn't myself ud run the risk of lettin' a nettle sting him widout your hearin' of it. An' good right ye have to think a power ov him, Masther Lawrence. Jack Morrow, the horse-breaker, says ye may win a pot o' money on him in another year, plaze goodness!'

This pleasant prophecy was received by Lawrence with a smile, bitter and incredulous rather than hopeful.

'Another straw?' he asked himself. 'One more crumbling brick to begin building up the Darcy fortunes anew with?'

'Come, there's nothing the matter with

him. There, away with you, my boy. Shoo!'

With a slap and a wave of the lantern, he started the colt. The suddenness of the movement took Mick so much by surprise that, forgetting the furze-bush which lay behind him, he capsized over it in trying to get out of the way, and landed in a safe but scarcely comfortable bed of mossy puddle, with his heels flourishing impotently aloft.

'Oh, the varmint! he's knocked me clane over! Blessed hour, 'tis well he wasn't hungry, or 'tis a male he'd be afther makin' o' me! Misther Lawrence avick, kape him off till I rise, an' the heavens be your bed! Ugh! they're far from bein' mine, just now, anyway. Hould on to the lanthorn, sorr, till we get through the gate. Is that him comin' agin? Lord save us!'

Lawrence, laughing at poor Mick's discomfiture, helped to pile the proper amount of incongruous material up as before, and then, leaving the lantern with Mick, sauntered back to the house.

Gall and wormwood were in his heart. Good heavens, was it this—this abject, hopeless poverty that he had to offer to the woman who was to share his lot? *This* that, in his selfish, reckless fashion, he would have dragged Gwenda down to? He knew that the mere actual poverty was not alone in his thoughts; harder to bear was the sense of just retribution, the certainty of having to dree his weird, accept his share of the outcome of year after year of misrule, and generation after generation of waste and riotous living.

Had there ever been a Darcy who was worth the ground his shadow fell on?

Was he himself any better than the rest? Yet, if it were not for the old man, he would take passage in the first outward-bound ship—ay, work his way out before the mast, it would be a good preparation—and in some new country, with the sweat of his brow, try to bring something of honest endeavour and purpose at least into the records of his house.

But his heart failed him at the thought of his father, broken down, infirm, left to face this dreary outlook. The mere thought of it seemed cowardly, because of the relief it would have brought himself thus to fly from it all.

With a sigh he stood a moment at the porch, letting the wind cool his burning temples and lift his clustering brown locks with the tender lightness of a woman's hand. From out of the dim recesses of

memory there came to him the consciousness of such a gentle touch, of soft warm lips pressing his own, and a voice like the music we hear in dreams. And a storm of passionate regret took hold of him.

'Mother, oh, mother!' he cried, 'if you had lived—if you had lived—— !'

Ah, the potentiality of that small word 'if'! The numberless wrongs that would have been righted, the great deeds done, the waste places made to flourish, and crooked things made straight, if only—everything that ever happened to us since the day of our birth had been exactly reversed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAPTAIN COVERED WITH GLORY.

The bright frosty weather soon gave place to days of dulness and cold; and at last one morning Gwenda woke in a great white world; all around was one beautiful, heaved-up mass of sparkling purity. From the double windows of her father's room in the tower she looked down east and west over this, the grand regal mantle of winter, stretched without break or fleck into the hazy distance miles away.

What a delicious sense of isolation it brought with it! There, at her feet, the

world, as defined by that sweeping white arc, seemed all her own; so still, so deserted of everything living did it appear. Downward on all sides sloped the heaving billows, sparkling, scintillating with myriad points of light; everywhere, as far as eye could reach, the same absolute repose, the same wonderful, awe-inspiring silence reigned.

All unsightly angles were covered or rounded into forms of new, strange beauty; it was as though nature, in a wild fit of mad gaiety, had waved her wand over the earth, and behold! nothing was as it had been; Cybele, the enchanted maid, lay sleeping in her bridal robes, and Phœbus, the Prince, alone could waken her.

Along the eastern sky, the roseleaf radiance of morning was gradually melting

into pale, sweet gold; while overhead the clear blue of a frosty, winter's day seemed to stretch into illimitable depths of light-laden space.

Close at hand, the upper surface of the feathery crystals could have been fluttered with a breath. Between the double windows they had found their way, and made downy cushions round the sills.

Gwenda raised the windows, and the icy breath of the morning nearly took her own away as she leaned out to take in, with delight, all that eye could reach of this marvellous new loveliness.

Curious little tracks ran here and there beside the hedges; the 'broad arrow' marks of hungry birds. And, across the fields, from hedge to hedge, what marks are those? Surely some four-footed animal has come over there straight as a die,

in a direct line to the stable-yard. Had Boatswain chosen a snowy night for a ramble? If so, it would be a decided departure from his usual predilection for warmth and the shelter of his comfortable house.

Looking to the left, what a sharp contrast the great line of sea made! To-day all the life seemed there. How ceaseless was the sparkle and shimmer of its waves; how the sun seemed to catch every tiny fleck of foam and turn it to gold; how full of real, breathing life seemed the barks that glided over its glorious plane; one following the other in stately silence, like a fleet of swans on a lake. Sea and sky, which was mirrored and which was real it was hard to tell; each was as wide and blue and deep as the other. Gwenda felt as if she had suddenly been brought into

the realms of elf-land, and that, were she for a moment to look away, all would vanish like the misty fabric of a dream.

And this is a doomed and dying world; a vale of tears and desolation: a place, my friends, in which the wise and prudent walk with sad countenance and eyes seeking the ground, infinitely preferring the mire they find there to the splendours of light and colour above and around. Albeit, their creator has surely made the things of earth thus beautiful for some beneficent reason, mayhap to be enjoyed!

These very good people were not consulted when the sky was painted blue, and the fields and trees clothed with living green, and the tiny brooklets set ablaze with myriads of dropped diamonds, and lurking treasures of silver and gold. In their inmost hearts they look with dis-

favour on the countless tiny flowrets that persist in decking their path; they are inclined to think it immoral of them to dress in rainbow hues and try to look always their very best. No doubt these excellent persons, had they been allowed a voice in the matter, would have draped the universe in black, and fitted the sun with a tap to be screwed down when not strictly required for purposes of utility.

But Gwenda was not of these; and her thoughts, as she gazed out and around, were rather, 'Oh, if all this be so fair, what—what can heaven be like?'

Sometimes the sense of the world's beauty comes upon us like a new revelation. We seem to have been asleep, lying in dull, sottish lethargy for a while, when suddenly the piercing of a ray into our darkness makes us open startled eyes and

see—even as he of Bethsaida saw when the great Healer of all touched him—with new eyes, new light, new faith !

Gwenda was blessed with the seeing eyes of a thoughtful and imaginative nature. All her young life had been spent here on this quiet hill-top, where Nature, free and untrammeled, spread out from year to year her feast of good things for those who cared to taste and enjoy.

But for lips blue and pinched with actual physical hunger there is sorry comfort in such a banquet, and Gwenda knew that few eyes besides her own would take delight in the wide, white landscape; few care to note the shimmer of sunlight out at sea, or the gleam of the seagull's wing as he flies screaming back from a fruitless quest on land.

So many hearts just then were full of

the bitterness of death—sullen grief for the lost—agonized terror for the living. Yet—yet—how Nature herself seems to long to comfort us! How like the sleeping sigh of an infant is the touch of the breeze on our cheek; sweet ministering airs, that beg and bring with them the perfumes of a thousand flowers, come floating at the great queen's bidding to fan our fevered brows and whisper gentle memories that for a moment hide with rings of rosy vapour the arid wretchedness of the path our feet are sore with treading!

But there is, alas! an agony of the soul so far beyond reach—almost of heaven's healing!—that every ray of glad sunshine, every ring of happy laughter, song of bird, or brook, or sea, is as the turning of a dagger in a rankling wound; like the drop

of cold water on the head of the tortured victim of the Inquisition.

Shadowy thoughts such as these floated across Gwenda's mind as she gazed out in dreamy mood from her eyrie.

How icily it strikes on the young heart that first dawning perception of the cruelty of fate—the seeming injustice of Life's apportionment—the weight of the million wrongs that can never be righted—the sufferings of the innocent—the triumphs of the prosperous wicked!

Too old a story is it to wake a passing sigh from most. But the young feel it—sometimes—when they have leisure to pause and think. Old is it as the fable of the child who chases his butterfly through flowery meads, conscious only of the blue above and the sun before him; till, tired at last, he pauses and looks around.

Then his startled eyes behold a change! Somewhere—he cannot tell where—the world is dead and sunless. Threatening storm-clouds have shut out its beauty. They are coming nearer! Will he too have to share the terror; must his sun, too, die out under the creeping chill of that awful pall?

The sense of something new and terrible—what is its name: pain, death, or desolation?—fills the soft heart with dread. It has had a glimpse behind the veil! Pitying angels, draw the folds again! Touch the young eyes to sleep!

Gwenda closed her window with a half-unconscious sigh, and went downstairs to seek her father and give him his breakfast.

In the hall she found Nellie with round eyes, full of tidings.

'Oh, Miss Gwendy! Think of the fox, the thafe of the world, comin' an' takin' away a beautiful white duck last night! Didn't Pat find the feathers scatthered all around in the mornin'! He must hev jumped the yard wall clare an' clane, for the big gates wor locked safe enough!'

Gwenda remembered the tracks she had seen in the snow. Here was the mystery solved. It was no other than this cruel marauder who had left that silent witness on Nature's virgin page, marking with fell intent for the white-breasted innocent who would quack no more the jubilant first notes of Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March' in triumphant exultation over the 'Much rain' of the captain's barometer. 'Mod-hereen Rhua' had made short work of him. No doubt the door of the hen-house

had not been fastened; being inside the big yard-gates, no one had till now thought that precaution necessary.

Pat was called, and warned to be more careful in attending to this for the future; and accordingly that worthy started there and then to fashion a heavy wooden bolt sufficiently formidable to keep out a royal Bengal tiger.

Now the loss of the duck was vexatious enough; it was one of a late brood, and in excellent condition for the table, which no doubt the fox would have been quite ready to certify. But when next morning the big Spanish cock, the captain's especial favourite, was missing, the consternation was widespread and deep. Chanticleer, who every morning challenged the sun right under his master's window, and that in a voice which reached shrilly down

to the lowest hamlet within sight, waking far-away sleepy echoes from his various kith and kin quick to retort! Why, the captain would almost as soon have lost his sheet-anchor watch as the attentions of this most punctual and exemplary cock!

With much hesitation—in fear and trembling—Gwenda broke the sad news to him, and, as they expected, great was his wrath.

Now the captain, since he had come ashore, and become a family man, was strict in limiting his vocabulary to a certain decorous range which proved on the whole ample for the usual exigencies of daily life. But on this occasion it was very much tried—in fact, found wanting; so much so as to necessitate a slight—a very slight—lapse into the forbidden

vigour of earlier days; days when the prompt furling of a sail or hauling of a rope was believed to be sovereignly expedited by the plentiful use of a certain big capital letter which, as riddle books tell us, 'always follows the sea.'

Forthwith he sallied out to make immediate inspection of the hen-house, and investigate the means whereby Reynard had been able to laugh at locks, bolts, and bars of the sapient Pat's devising. And here he found Pat himself, scratching his head and looking very foolish.

For the mystery was patent at a glance. There stood what was dignified with the name of a window wide open, having been pushed in deftly by the fox; serving his purpose quite as well as though the front door had been left as hospitably ajar as before.

Then descended on Pat's devoted head the full majestic torrent of the captain's wrath! Then for the first time did his quaking servitor fully appreciate the terrible things he had escaped by not going to sea! Keelhauling was much too lenient a punishment for his crass stupidity: hanging at the yard-arm only strict justice.

Pat shook in his brogues, and vowed, with the help of the saints and a borrowed blunderbuss, either to kill that fox or himself before another night was over their heads.

As the latter was much the more likely result of Pat's tampering with anything in the shape of an explosive weapon, the captain cooled down a little, conscious that with all his faults it would nevertheless be very inconvenient to have to

do without Pat at present. And that worthy, quick to take advantage of the softening ray, managed by degrees to divert his master's righteous anger from his own to the head of the more immediate culprit.

A consultation was held, and a grand strategic project devised. A coil of rope was fetched, and an end of it was fastened to the hen-house door in such a way that the holder when hidden in another shed conveniently situated could bang to the door at any given moment, and so make the fox prisoner—provided he were inside.

It was a masterly arrangement when finished, and the captain and his henchman looked at it with all the pardonable pride of a Hannibal or a Cæsar—peace being declared on the head of it. Finally,

they remembered to nail up the window, and so, rubbing his hands in pleased anticipation of a speedy revenge, the captain went in to dinner.

Pat was to have no share of the glory. At half-past eight every night he trudged through the fields to his home and family in fear and trembling, being possessed from sunset until dawn with a wild, unreasoning, spirit-crushing terror of things uncanny.

Bogles lay in wait for him behind every furze-bush; tall gibbering ghosts resolved themselves unaccountably into harmless gate-posts as he approached; weird witch revels were borne to him out of the darkness on the wings of the wind. Pat was indeed physically and morally an unmitigated coward, and, to do him justice, never even attempted to hide the fact.

Too patent, it would have been sheer impossible to do so.

Alone, then, the captain was to take this matter in hand: he owed it to the memory of the black cock, the finest bird that ever came out of shell; that ever with shrill clarion proclaimed the dewy morn!

All through dinner the captain was in remarkably good spirits; so much so that Gwenda felt inclined to resent such apparent heartlessness, when they were all prepared for at least twenty-four hours of decent, inconsolable sorrow for the dead hero. Little knew she of the sweets of vengeance!—of the fortitude with which Billy Snooks chokes down the sob of pain and rage, and, with fire flashing from his one undamaged optic, possesses his soul in

patience till his adversary shall essay the merits of a skilfully adjusted pin which Billy has placed at his disposal in the innocent-looking crevices of the homely bench.

Not even to Gwenda would the captain betray a syllable of his blood-thirsty intentions. He knew too well the objections he would have to combat; prophecies of certain rheumatism and influenza—fudge, of course, to a man who had spent his nights buffeting north-easters, with hail, rain, and sleet as accompaniments. But the good captain forgot that all this was in the days when his locks were brown, and his shoulders straight as the mast by his side.

And the spirit of those days was strong in him. Himself a loyal servant of king and crown, was this impudent piece of

contraband to be perpetrated under his very nose—almost within shadow of his own roof-tree?

Never! Shade of Nelson hear the vow!

Accordingly, the night being dark save for the gleam of virgin snow—a night well fitted for a deed of fell and malevolent purpose—the captain, with all a burglar's stealth, left his room and unpressed bed as soon as the household waxed quiet, and gliding as lightly as his respectable weight would admit of—much harassed by the tell-tale proclivities of wooden stairs—let himself out at the back door, and took up his post in the shed, rope in hand.

Improvising a seat by means of an upturned barrel, he remained for a while in the pleasant excited state of momentary expectation that always commences a watch.

The poultry had for this night been safely transferred and locked up in the coach-house.

As time wore on, however, and nothing appeared, the situation became monotonous, and the captain wished the barrel had been made of softer material. His frieze overcoat kept him warm, but his legs were growing cramped, and the atmosphere of the shed was unpleasantly suggestive of geese. It would be strangely disappointing if the marauder failed to put in an appearance on this very night when a warm reception had been so carefully arranged for him.

He could hear the hours as they were struck by the old kitchen clock. Twelve, one,—surely there was a much longer interval then till two, and at last three. Decidedly it was getting colder—perhaps

drawing on to frost. Longing thoughts began to assail him of a warm, soft bed; of even a stiff glass of rum-and-water administered before seeking it—baffled, indeed, for this time, but not conquered; resolved to try again and yet again for the discomfiture of his enemy and the honour of the house of Chetwynd—when——

Slowly, sneakingly, out of the darkness stole a cautious, gliding form. Not a sound betrayed its steps; onward it drew over the snow, a dark phantom of the night, menacing the gentle, feathered sleepers who were even now, perchance, dreaming of their murdered lord.

Straight for the fowl-house it marked. The captain, threatened with a sneeze, held his breath and his nose till almost asphyxiated; his right hand, however, firmly grasping the rope.

The creature pauses. Listens. Moves on a step. Pauses once more. The captain's heart beats like the tick of his trusty chronometer.

Then, with a sudden, swift glide, it is in, and bang goes the door, the captain rushing out to shoot the heavy bolt, executing, immediately after, a sort of war-dance reminiscent of his hornpipe days, in ecstatic jubilation over his capture. Next, to make assurance doubly sure and prevent mishap through Pat's injudicious curiosity, he attached a padlock to the rusty staple, pocketing the key.

Then, feeling that now indeed he fully deserved it, the doughty sailor went in and mixed himself the promised stiff tumbler, and warmed his chilled legs at the smouldering fire before seeking welcome rest.

Great was the excitement in the morning when it became known that, single-handed, the captain had trapped the red-haired poacher 'Modhereen Rhua.'

Not since the 'taking of Martinique'—George Chetwynd's crowning day of glory, when he received the cut from cheek to brow that he was wont to protest was the one unlucky interference with nature's original intention of making him an Adonis—not since then was he a prouder man.

The next question was what to do with the fox now they had got him.

You may murder your grandmother, shoot three landlords, or crack the skull of your best friend with a shillelagh in Ireland, and perhaps get off with a verdict of 'Not guilty, but don't do it again.' But cut short the promising career of a

fox by any means but the orthodox one of chasing with hounds and horse, and you are a doomed man. Accept the brand of Cain! abandon hope! Heaven is lost! purgatory itself shuts its gates against you!

The captain, having a sailor's tender-heartedness for all 'happy living things,' did not favour hunting. But he did not care to betray the weakness too openly. That it *was* a weakness, an entirely reprehensible failing on his part, he was humbly convinced. So he made a brave show of opposition to Gwenda's womanish dislike to having the wretched culprit handed over to the tender mercies of the 'Faugh-a-Ballagh Hunt.'

'The British love of sport, my dear, has developed the thews and sinews that make one of our tars a match for three of

the miserable parley-vooers any day. Yes, yes, though I don't hunt myself, I can believe it to be healthy, and a—exhilarating—like clapping on all sail with the black flag in front of you!'

And the captain rubbed his hands, pleased with his comparison.

'But, father, suppose three of our tars were to set upon one poor Frenchman! What would you think of it?'

'Think of it?—Bless my soul, child, we haven't three such lubbers in the service, I should hope! Three of our men to one! and that a paltry, mincing, shrugging, dancing-master of a Frenchman, who can't even explain himself in any Christian form of speech—nothing but shrugs and grunts and outlandish antics!'

Gwenda laughed merrily.

'Do you know, father, you have been

pleading the fox's cause beautifully all this time. What you say applies to him quite as well—figuratively.'

'Oh, hum!' said the captain, as he pushed back his cup, 'so that is what you are driving at. But even I don't put a fox and a Frenchman quite on a par, miss!'

It must have cost the captain something to assert this. Privately, we believe he ranked the four-footed animal a degree higher.

'I hate cruelty,' said Gwenda, 'whether towards man or beast. I have no doubt that, if he had been consulted, the fox would have chosen rather to be an antelope or an elephant——'

'He'd have been hunted all the same,' interpolated the captain.

'But, being a fox, do you expect him

to glory in the noble mission of helping, by his martyrdom, to build up the thews and sinews of the youthful Briton?'

'Pooh, pooh! a fox is a robber—a cut-throat—a skulking prowler! By George, if I had happened to be looking out when he went off with that fine black cock, I would have sent a charge of buckshot after him, I promise you!'

Without doubt the captain would have done so, and probably found his feelings considerably relieved thereby; whether the fox would have suffered at all by the ceremony is doubtful. For the worthy sailor had never been known to hit anything in his life with the assistance of powder and shot, though given to firing from his window at crows in seed-time, a little joke which they appeared to take in excellent part, as it never interfered in the

least with their enjoyment of the succulent potato and sprouting corn.

'No, no,' said the captain, as he finished his coffee, 'I'm not to be bamboozled. We hang sheep-stealers—or did in good old King George's time. No eye-piping and mock sentiment in those days; vermin of all sorts got their deserts. Though, I suppose, because Dr. Watts says "'tis their nature to," you would want to let them off with sixpence and a tract, "to encourage the others."'

Whereupon, Gwenda being vanquished, or at any rate silenced, the captain, pluming himself upon this his masterly defence of the noble science of fox-hunting, went out to consult Pat as to the feasibility of despatching Reynard secretly by means of poppy or mandragora, or other euthanasy to the happy hunting-grounds where,

if the balance of things are ever to be rightly adjusted, he might at last taste the sweets of pursuing who so long had been pursued.

'Oh, but 'twas the clever thrick to catch him that-away,' cried Pat, exultant. 'Musha, but I'd ha' given my Sunday breeches to ha' seen him walkin' in so nately to the thrap, an' the doore bangin' on him. But, my sowl to glory, captain jewel, what would the Faugh-a-Ballagh Hunt say if we was to murther the crathur in could blood? Och, faith, we might fly the counthry if we was to do it! An' sure 'twould be the burnin' shame to waste him that-away, an' foxes so scarce, too, hereabouts.'

'Scarce!' echoed the captain, with a growl, 'they're a little too plenty for me. Now, Pat, take the pitchfork in your hand,

just as a precaution. I'll only open the door half an inch, just to get a peep at the fellow. Here, catch the padlock. Now, gently with the bolt. Avast there —don't move till I tell you!'

'Oh, faith, your honour, 'tis through the kayhole that wily baste wud be comin'—if there was one. I'll hould the doore tight till ye spake, sorr. Whist! I hear him movin', glory be to goodness!'

'Now, Pat, softly—half an inch, no more. Now keep your shoulder there while I look.'

The captain applied one eye to the crack, and peered long and closely into the dark recesses of the hen-house.

'A little wider, Pat. It's as dark as Davy's locker. I thought I had pretty good night sight, too.'

'Oh, Lord, your honour, take care!

Sure, it's just the tail of him whiskin' over the wall we'll see if we give him the width of a thraneen to creep through. 'Tis hidin' he'll be, the cunnin' rogue, purtindin' he isn't there at all at all.'

'Here, change places with me, and take a look yourself. My eyes are a bit dazzled with the snow. Gently now, Pat, gently. Don't pull the door.'

There being only available space for one, Pat seemed unable to decide which eye to give the preference to, but having at last adjusted himself into the close resemblance of a cock looking into a bottle, he too peered anxiously into the murky depths, and then on a sudden began to shout and invoke the saints in a frenzy of admiration.

'Oh, holy St. Bridget, there he is! Oh, the murdherin' thafe, I see the two eyes ov him shinin' ay'ant there in the corner

like the lamps iv the Bantry coach! Keep your showldher hard agin the doore, masther, if ye plaze, while I let ye pass me. Now, sorr, look; down there in the lift-hand corner he's sittin', wid the tail of him curled nately round him like a rapin' hook. Oh, the black villin!'

Again the captain placed himself in position, and this time he was rewarded by seeing two green glaring points in the distant corner, seemingly fixed straight upon him.

'Well, he's there safe enough, at any rate, Pat. He's made a mistake this time, the scoundrel. No fat hen for supper to-night, my boy. By George, how his eyes shine! Talk of emeralds,—they're like bottled lightning! How the deuce, though, are we going to lay hands on him?'

Pat scratched his head, and looked dubiously at his master.

'Come, you're born and bred in a hunting country, Pat. You should know how to tackle a fox.'

'Me, sorr! Is it me lay a finger on the ugly baste, an' him wid teeth that would bite through a crow-bar as aisy as a carrot? Oh, Lord, your honor, I couldn't do it for the Pope himself; 'twould be the death o' me, masther dear, to touch him!'

'Then I suppose we shall have to send for the whole Faugh-a-Ballagh Hunt to come here and make an end of him. A pretty piece of excitement that would be with red coats flying over my turnips, and Gwenda in hysterics in the top room. The deuce take the beast and all his crew,

whatever are they made for? Hey! what was that?'

A long drawn 'miaou—ou—ou' came in plaintive accents from the corner.

'Why—dash my wig!'

The captain listened again with his mouth puckered up ready to whistle, which he presently did in lugubrious fashion as the whole bearings of the situation began to dawn upon him. He let his eyes slowly draw round to where Pat stood spell-bound.

But the expression of his faithful henchman's face was too much for him. It was so full of respectful sympathy, of innocent surprise, of deep disappointment—of everything, in fact, but rollicking amusement and intense relief; both which the captain very well knew were struggling hard to

come to the surface—that the jolly sailor fairly succumbed, and started a roar of laughter that Pat was fain to join in after some moments of heroic effort to retain an altogether impossible gravity.

The captain stamped about and doubled himself up, wiping his eyes the while with his silk handkerchief.

'Oh, Lord, here's a nice lubber's hole we've got into! Catching old Kitty Coleman's big, grey Tom instead of the fox! Oh, Gemini! if Boyster gets hold of it he'll turn it into another Chevy Chase, with twenty-five verses and a chorus! There, let the critter go, Pat. There's no hunting for us to-day.'

Pat gingerly opened the door, and the cat, indignant at being treated in this unusual fashion, made a bolt through, delivering its sentiments at the same time

in language feline and forcible, so as to make Pat jump backwards as if shot.

'Holy Moses, I might ha' known the spiteful ould baste by the eyes ov him! Troth, many's the night whin I've called in at Kitty's for a light to my pipe, an' me goin' home, I would see him sittin' fornenst her at the fire-side—faith, I don't doubt but he could smoke a pipe too as well as any Christian. I hope to the saints he won't tell Kitty the way we've been thratin' him!'

'What the deuce are you afraid of, man?' asked the captain, as Pat shook his head and looked solemn.

'Och, well, your honour don't belave in such things, I know; but as thrue as I'm here, when Kitty Coleman's angered she can put the pisherogue on them as does it. Sure, wasn't Micky Doolan's cow choked

wid a turnip just wan blessed week afther he turned her pig out ov his cabbage-garden. He little knew when he was throwin' the bit ov a stone at it that herself was lookin' on at him from the road beyant. An' sure himsilf toult me that the look she gave him seemed fairly to burn a hole in his heart, an' all she said to him was, "Ye'll live to repint it, Mick Doolan." Faith, he was all ov a' thrimble while she stood fornenst him!'

'I don't doubt it,' muttered the captain.

'Oh, she's a terrible woman all out, so she is. An' she knows more about the "good people," Lord save us, than anyone from here to Banagher. Troth, I'm mortial unaisy about that cat, sorr!'

'Well, well, I'm responsible. I'll take the consequences, Pat,' said the captain.

Pat, sad to confess, was a most arrant coward. Steeped in superstition, he lived in constant dread of visitations from everything imagination can conjure in the shape of ghost, fairy, ogre, and witch. The extreme ignorance of the Irish peasantry, at the period we treat of, fostered this. Their minds, naturally imaginative, fed eagerly on traditions that were handed down, orally, from generation to generation—incredibly wild legends, having local habitation in the immediate surroundings, and therefore believed in by the people as a matter of common faith, as implicitly as they accepted the creed their priests taught them.

If, therefore, on a gusty night, Pat found some difficulty in keeping his lan-

tern alight—or should he discover that a pot of blacking had been mysteriously upset —or a door refuse to open—he never for a moment hesitated to account for the phenomenon by placing it to the credit of the 'good people,' who are understood to be extremely touchy on the question of title, and, for some reason best known to themselves, to wax ireful at the name of fairy. They are also much given to practical jokes, which, strange to say, seem as pointless as any we mortals have experience of.

'Well, the fox may be hanged before I'll sit up for him another night,' said the captain. 'But I say, Pat, see to the fastening of that hen-house, mind you! By the Lord Harry, he shan't find his supper here again!'

So he stamped away into the house, not

feeling quite so much like Admiral Drake or Lord Nelson as he had on coming out.

Gwenda was sitting by the window, sewing.

'Well, father, what have you done with him?'

The captain had his back turned, and was poking the fire vigorously. It seemed to require a good deal of attention. Suddenly his shoulders began to shake, and, dropping the poker, he subsided into his chair, kicking up his heels and roaring with laughter.

'Oh, Lord, when I think of Pat's face! It'll be the death of me. I say, Gwenda, what do you suppose we've been making all the fuss about?—arguing about the propriety of fox-hunting, forsooth!' here he went off into a paroxysm that threat-

ened apoplexy. 'What do you think we caught, after all?'

'Why, the fox—was it not?'

'Not a hair of him—nothing but old Widow Coleman's big tom-cat! Oh, but I'm a lost man if Boyster or Father Tom get hold of it. I'll never have a day's peace again.'

Gwenda could not but join in the laugh, knowing full well, too, that her father would take the very first opportunity of telling the story to his cronies, he being one of those rarely constituted people who can to the full enjoy a joke of which he is himself the butt.

They were still laughing when Nellie appeared with the message that 'Norah the market-woman was waiting in the kitchen.' And, as Norah was no ordinary

character, we will ask the reader to assist at Gwenda's interview.

'Why, Norah, you are not really thinking of going into town to-day?'

'Yis, miss, I am so.'

'But, Norah, the snow is dreadfully thick; you could not get through it.'

'Yis, miss, I could.'

'But there is no need—we can do quite well for a day or two longer; you would be far more comfortable at home with your pipe.'

'No, miss, I wouldn't. 'Tis lonesome sittin' there all day.'

'But you would have Shaun and Maureen?'

'No, miss, they're gone wid the donkey to get a creel o' turf.'

Norah's abrupt style of speaking was

partly due to her imperfect knowledge of English, partly to temperament. She was a gaunt, large-boned woman, nearly six feet high. Her features were well-cut, and she wore her white hair—white with the snows of sixty years—drawn up over a cushion in a fashion that lasted long among the elderly peasant women of Ireland. But what was most striking about her was her curious uninterest in everything that might be going on immediately round her—everything that was not in any way connected with her daily business. Sitting erect there, with her hands folded on her knees and eyes fixed on vacancy, she might be an Egyptian statue—the Sphynx herself—rather than a living, thinking woman. Nellie might indulge in her wildest sallies, the cat might come and rub herself against her, all

Peggy's pots and pans come down with a clatter at her very ear, yet Norah's look of utter impassibility would never vary. If she had ever in her life given way to the weakness of a smile, it was not within the memory of the present generation.

There was something awesome in this impenetrable mask of gravity. One felt in looking at her as if those still blue eyes were always looking backward, and beholding some terrible scene, weird or tragic, that time had failed to efface.

Not that any such tradition existed. All that anyone seemed to know about her was that her husband died in his youth, leaving her, young too, with two helpless babes, and starvation for her portion. And perhaps that was sufficiently tragic. Perhaps, if some of us were given but a week of what went to make up

the sum of those sixty years, we might learn to understand why laughter, to those ears, was no better than 'the crackling of thorns under a pot;' why the faded blue eyes, sick of the sordid present, sought vainly for the hope and the youth buried in 'days that are no more.'

Looking at her, Gwenda used to wonder whether it was the face of the long, dead husband that filled the circle of that rapt gaze.

Yet, call Norah to attention, and you found it was no wittol you had to deal with. She was possessed of a most amazing memory, and had rarely, if ever, been known to forget one out of the countless commissions with which she was daily charged.

Not knowing a single letter of the alphabet, and speaking very indifferent

English, she was of course quite incapable of taking notes; but give her your message in Hebrew, so long as she mastered the sound of it, you might depend on its being correctly repeated to the person concerned.

Day after day she trudged in to Clonmacross, the market-town, a matter of some eight miles. Weather made not the slightest difference to her. She had a strange aversion to a day at home; if the household wanted no more than an ounce of pepper, Norah started off for it as a matter of course. It had got to be a part of her life this daily trudge; as her neighbours prophesied she would probably die on the road when her time came.

Here is a specimen of what was expected of her.

'Well, if you are quite determined on

going, Norah, we do want sugar—get seven pounds at Maloney's. And you had better bring tea—two pounds of the same as last—and oh, Nellie, you say we're out of mustard—and pepper—and washing-soda—and get a bar of the best kitchen soap—and oh, Norah, call at Miss Blake's and ask if my bonnet is trimmed yet—and get me a packet of No. 6 needles—and a skein of grey wool—and——'

'Hillo! Is that Norah?' shouts the captain from the parlour.

'Yis, sorr.'

'Then, Norah, go to Morgan's the stationer's, and get me a couple of sticks of good, red sealing-wax—*good*, mind! The last was wretched stuff.'

'Yis, sorr.'

'And, Norah!'

'Yis, sorr.'

'Call at Carthy's for my boots. They must be ready by this time.'

'Yis, sorr.'

'And, of course, get the letters and papers at the post-office.'

'Yis, sorr.'

'And leave word at Mr. Clancy the vet.'s that the horse's cough is better, and he need not mind coming out.'

'Yis, sorr.'

'That's all to-day, I think.'

So, when the servants had added their quota to this heterogeneous mixture, Norah prepared to depart. Throwing her black cloth cloak over the long back basket or creel, in which she carried her parcels, she slung it over her shoulder by means of a cloth band which passed round her neck. Then, in perfect silence, she passed out by the back door

—no one giving or expecting a parting word.

Gwenda, who had gone upstairs, saw her swinging down the avenue at her usual swift pace; curiously suggestive of a camel with that cloth-covered hump and space-devouring stride. Not the most active man in the neighbourhood could compete with Norah for speed.

Once a poor kitchen-maid came out from Clonmacross under Norah's guidance, to take up her place at the Tower. Gradually, after starting, the distance between them grew wider, Norah forging ahead like a clipper before the wind. By-and-by, having reached the top of a short and steep hill, she seemed to remember her charge, and turning round called to her :

'Are ye comin'?'

And the girl, toiling breathless below, shouts in return,

'Och yis, I'm comin'!'

'Humph! Wake enough, then!' Norah makes comment.

Again she shoots ahead, and again on the next coign of vantage she stops and makes the same enquiry, to be answered once more, with a little less urbanity,

'Yis, yis, I'm comin'!'

'Humph!' again grunts Norah. 'Wake enough.'

And this colloquy was held at regular intervals all along the road, till the poor tired-out servant sank half-dead at last on the welcome kitchen chair, 'wake enough,' certainly.

Not for all the gold of Golconda would she have started again to walk a mile in Norah's company.

CHAPTER VII.

MY DAME HAS LOST HER SHOE.

New fallen snow has been lauded and praised and upheld as the type of all things pure and immaculate, since the first flake fell on the top of Mont Blanc; reputations without end have been compared to it—let us hope they stood the test of time a little better. For in all creation there is nothing so forbidding and unlovely as the sea of slush and mud it resolves into when the sun has had sway for a day or two, with perhaps a little rain to help. Then do the roads become quagmires, squelching

and squeaking with every footstep; soaking through boots be they five-ply thick.

In due course all this happened round the Grey Tower. But Gwenda was only too glad of release on any terms. The snow had kept her prisoner for nearly a week, and she felt much concerned about some poor families she had been wont to visit, to whom the cessation of her calls meant starvation—or very near it—unaided by the little dole she was used to bring them.

Her father having started in the gig for Sandy Bay, his farthest station, Gwenda equipped herself as best she might for the encounter; and having packed a basket with everything in the shape of food that could be carried—no light weight when all was done—set out bravely enough.

Not till she had got outside the avenue

gate did the full horror of the undertaking present itself. The road lay before her like a badly-ploughed field. Carts in passing had sunk deep into the snow, and the wheel-ruts were now shining runlets of water with the grimy mixture of snow and mud piled high between them.

And with every step a creaking squelch sent the mud flying, spattering neatly polished boots and dainty skirt with envious malignity. Well was it for Gwenda that she allowed common sense to over-rule vanity in dictating the thickness of her soles—albeit the pretty foot suffered not a whit in being sensibly shod. And a remarkably pretty foot—and ankle too—they were that were making painful efforts to pass through that Slough of Despond with as little scathe as might be.

Overhead, the sky seemed 'right down

ashamed' of things below, and was doing its best to make up for it by smiling and glowing; little white clouds like stray fleeces slipping after each other over the blue, and playing bo-peep with the sun.

To Gwenda every inch of the road was familiar, yet never had it seemed so interminably long and dreary. Her ankles ached, and the basket on her arm seemed to grow in weight like the burden of St. Christopher. But not for a moment did she repent her undertaking. She only drew her skirts a little closer, and wondered what on earth Peggy would do with her boots when she got home.

But the longest lane—and the muddiest road—has an ending, and gladly Gwenda caught sight of the wretched cabin that was the object of her mission to-day.

Standing back a little from the road,

and on lower level, it was of course surrounded by the unspeakable horrors inseparable from that class of dwelling in Ireland. Every facility was given to the collection and retention of a green mass of liquid abomination, across which stepping-stones had been thoughtfully placed for the accommodation of the ultra squeamish. But oceans of attar—all the spices of Araby—could not have quelled the clamant potency of its odours.

Gwenda knew what she had to encounter here. Gathering her dress tightly round her, and holding her breath, she crossed the fearful causeway trembling. Rochester thought no man was a hero who had not essayed to snuff a candle with his fingers; he had never been to Ireland, else he would have chosen a better test of valour.

As Gwenda found safety on the thres-

hold, a loud burst of welcome and a cloud of turf smoke greeted her simultaneously. The smoke, though it smarted her eyes and made her cough, was hardly unpleasant after her recent experience of the muck-heap.

A woman, who would have been good-looking if freed from the clutches of carking care and poverty, was sitting beside the few turf sods which sent out this surprising amount of reek and very little heat. She had been holding an infant on her knees, but now rose with delighted alacrity to find a seat for Gwenda. The scanty ray of light that found entrance at all fell on her face from a shapeless hole through the mud wall, by courtesy called a window. Somewhere in the darkness more children were disputing place with the pig, whose dissatisfied grunts and

squeaks mingled with the din of their shrill voices. And, as Gwenda's sight grew accustomed to the gloom, she perceived that the father was lying on a wretched apology for a bed, with a broad linen bandage across his head and covering one eye.

'Oh, thin, the heavens be your bed for ivermore, Miss Gwendy! For if iver there was a saint in this wide world 'tis yerself. Och, wirasthru! to think o' the miles ye've walked wid that basket, an' your purty feet jist smothered wid the mud!'

She had rubbed the one available seat with her apron, and now before Gwenda could stop her she was on her knees trying to wipe off the thick mud from her boots.

'Mary, Mary, you must not do that,' Gwenda cried. 'It does not in the least

matter what they are like. You know they will be worse before I get back.'

'Och, if I could make the roads goold for ye to walk upon, my darlint, sure it's meself would do it on my knees!' the woman said, while her grey eyes welled up with grateful tears.

The children, at sight of the basket, left the pig in lordly possession of the disputed corner, and sat in hushed expectancy, with eyes like magnets turning to a load-stone.

Gwenda took a home-baked loaf from it which she divided amongst them, while she talked to the mother, sympathizing with the baby's teething troubles and little Maureen's burnt fingers.

'And I was sorry to hear that Mick has been getting his head broken at Drimmeen fair,' Gwenda said, looking over at the

vanquished hero, who met the glance with sheepish contrition.

'Och, thin, 'twas the misfortinit day for him that he wint there at all at all. For sure himself had no call there, only to sell a pig for ould Mat Rooney, that's past goin' himself. An' Mick was comin' home quite pacable, whin all ov a suddint the faction fight began, an' some one giv him a crack, an', in coorse, he couldn't but give back another, an' thin sorrow bit more he remimbers but wakin' up in Pat Daishy's cart wid the stars shinin' down on him, an' another boy o' the Murphy's lyin' wid a broken arm beside him.'

'That's jist the blissid truth, miss,' Mick chimed in.

'But it's not the first misfortune that has happened to you at a fair, Mick. Surely, with a wife and these poor chil-

dren depending on you, it would be wiser —would it not—to stay away?'

'Musha, thin, miss, 'tis thrue for ye! I wish I'd niver taken hoult o' the sougan for Mat Rooney—bad cess to him an' his pig!'

'Oh, Mick,' said Gwenda, laughing, 'you *will* put the saddle on the wrong horse!'

There was a twinkle in Mick's one available eye that somewhat belied his simplicity. But Gwenda did not pursue the question, wisely concluding that he had had plenty of time for reflection and repentance during the week of his enforced stay in that reeky corner, enlivened only by the musical interludes of children and pigs. So she turned her attention to young Mick and his progress at the National School.

'Indade, thin, miss, he'd be a rael fine scholar intirely if I could only let him go reg'lar. But what can I do whin we'd miss the little he airns that terrible? He goes with Mr. Clancy's donkey for a creel o' sand or turf, an' he does a bit weedin' or cleanin' for some o' the neighbours, an' 'tis not often he can get a spare day for the school.'

'Do you like going to school, Micky?'

'Oh, troth, I do, miss. I wish I could get goin' every day, so I do.'

'Well, make the most of your time while you are there. I know your mother will let you go as often as she can—perhaps it will be oftener when your father is well and at work again.'

The lad had a bright, honest, freckled face, very pleasant to look upon. As Gwenda watched the blue eyes dancing

with fun, no presage of what coming years would bring threw its chill shadow across the picture; no vision of passion-distorted features scowling from behind a hedge; of the sullen gleam of murder in those eyes whose brightness is quenched in hate! Well for us is it that 'our future's a sealed seed-plot,'—merciful the decree that renders the seal inviolable.

Having settled with Mary that until her husband's recovery she was to send one of the children daily for such scraps as the kitchen could spare, Gwenda took up her basket, and, followed by prayers and blessings, started once more on her toilsome walk. How tired she began to feel as the long road opened itself before her, and how tantalizingly near the Grey Tower loomed, darkly outlined against the soft blue sky on the hill above!

After some quarter-of-an-hour's walk, she came to a place where a rude stile led in a straight line across the fields, cutting short for those who followed it a long detour of the winding road. The temptation to try the path was strong. No doubt the fields were very wet, but as the grass was short they could not possibly be worse than those horrible roads.

The question was quickly decided. Gwenda was over the stile in a moment, and found the change very pleasant, though the springy turf was decidedly wetter than was quite agreeable. She crossed some three or four fields easily, till she reached the last, which led back into the road. Now, because of this particular field lying lower, it was in a worse state than any of the rest; but, with the stile only a few yards in front, Gwenda

plunged boldly through the marshy ground, till all of a sudden she felt herself sinking ankle deep in a morass. The tenacious mud held her feet with the grip of an octopus; try as she would to lift them, the powerful suction of the swampy mass resisted all her efforts. At her side, close by the hedge, there seemed to be firm ground; could she but reach that she might make her way along, holding by the bushes, to the stile. After a struggle, she succeeded in getting one foot free and placed on a firmer hold; the other was as obstinately held as ever. Tug as she would, the mud was stronger and as obdurate as Fate. It seemed as if she had no better outlook than to remain here in ignominious durance till she either sank out of sight altogether, or by rare chance

was rescued by one of the few passengers likely to pass this way before nightfall.

This being but a dismal prospect, Gwenda once more redoubled her efforts, and at last, feeling the foot give a little, she threw herself forward, and, clutching at a gnarled furze-root, managed to reach the bank. But—it was with the loss of her boot, the fastenings of which had obligingly given way in order to procure her freedom!

Clinging by the furze-bush, she looked wistfully at the grave of the vanished boot. But it would have been folly to venture back for it; 'twas already sunk quite out of sight.

She climbed the stile into the road, 'a sadder and a wiser' woman. Proverbs, the result of other people's experience,

seldom occur to us till after we too have had the experience; the proverb arriving like an umbrella when the rain is over, aggravatingly superfluous. Gwenda remembered—too late—how she had once done penance for a blotted copy by re-writing a whole page of the sage axiom: 'The longest way round is the shortest way home.' She could see now the graceful wave made by the flourishing tails of capital Ts, and the splendid loops of the gs and ys. But the wisdom that might have stood her in good stead had gone like chaff before the wind.

And now the miseries of the morning were as nothing to what had come upon her. How was she to get home in such a plight? Limping along, feeling acutely the flinty hardness of Macadamized roads, she perhaps for the first time in her life

thoroughly realized the misery of those poor wretches whose lot it is always to go barefoot. The stones seemed endowed with an altogether supernatural malignity; there was no avoiding their sharp edges; they seemed to lie in wait to inflict torture on the tender skin.

Gladly she saw that she was near one of the numerous recesses in the road, which are placed at pretty regular intervals to hold the 'metal,'—*i.e.*, the broken stones—for filling up the wear and tear of traffic.

She made her way to it, and, climbing on to the heap of stones, was glad of even that poor rest while she reviewed her position. How long would it be before some passing cart, or even panniered donkey, would appear? Anything, however humble, would be more than welcome

—anything that could carry her home.

But no faintest sound broke the lazy stillness. The white clouds were still floating silently over her head, but they had drawn together, and, as if to add to her misery, were threatening rain. A few tiny drops tapped her sharply on the cheek as she looked up. The way she had come lay bare and drear behind her; not a living creature was visible upon it. Her homeward route was hidden by a bend of the road and the high hedges. She was trying to nerve herself once more to the effort of walking, when the even trot of a horse caught her ear.

'Father Tom!'

The certainty of the good priest's shrewd and ready help was a blessed relief.

'He is sure to know what to do. He will send me a cart from one of the cot-

tages, or at any rate find a messenger to the Tower.'

She watched the turning till the horse's nose appeared round the corner. But——Father Tom never wore buckskins and a red coat! It was Lawrence Darcy. He was off his horse and at her side almost before she had recognised him.

'Miss Chetwynd—Gwenda! what has happened? Are you hurt?'

This all in a breath, while, his eyes lighting on the unlucky member, a sprained ankle was the least of the catastrophes his fears conjured.

Fervently as Gwenda had prayed for assistance but a moment ago, she was not prepared for its reaching her in this embarrassing form. She coloured and answered, with a not very successful laugh,

'Oh, no, Mr. Darcy, I am not hurt at

all. But I have been punished, as I suppose I deserved, for my foolishness in trying to cross the fields by losing my boot in that slough by the corner.'

'Good heavens! you did not come through there!' he cried, walking across the road and looking into the field.

'But indeed I did, more's the pity. I shall never see my poor boot again.'

'Whereabouts did you lose it? Do you think it possible I might manage to rescue it?' he asked, preparing to jump over.

'No, no, it is utterly useless to try. It has gone down past all hope of recovery. I am only too glad I did not go down with it. There ought to be a notice put up there, I think, for the benefit of the unwary.'

He came back to her side.

'And you have been sitting here in the cold—how long?'

'Only half-an-hour or so.'

'Precious lucky I did not go home across country as usual. But for wanting to see Ned the smith, I would have for certain; and not another soul is likely to come this way till morning. Now, Curraghmore will carry you as quietly as a lamb—I will lead him, of course.'

'Oh, no,' cried Gwenda, involuntarily shrinking from the prospect of the long *tête-à-tête*, and vainly desirous not to betray the feeling; 'indeed I could not let you take that trouble. But if you would be so very good as to call at one of the cottages and send a cart——'

'A cart! My dear Miss Chetwynd, there has not been a cart—much less a

horse—on this side Kilcoran since ever the famine began.'

The truth of this dawned upon Gwenda in a moment.

He stood silently watching her troubled, downcast face.

'May I not do you so small a service as this, then? Will you indeed accept nothing at my hands?'

The passionate humiliation—the unconscious pleading—in his voice, touched her in spite of herself. She was nervously anxious to avoid all reference, all harking back, to the embarrassing question of their last meeting.

'No, no, pray do not speak like that! But I dislike to give so much trouble—to you or to anyone. How could I be so selfish as to let you put yourself to such —discomfort——'

He laughed at her search for a word.

'What a milksop you make me out to be! But talking of discomfort indeed! Your foot is absolutely soaking wet! What an idiot I was not to notice it sooner! Wait a moment.'

He searched in the pocket of his overcoat, and drew out a large silk muffler.

'There, that is the first time I have felt really grateful to old Nannie. She never sees me go out without insinuating this into my pocket, and till to-day has had small thanks for her pains. Now, while I walk Curraghmore up the road a bit and tighten the girths, you can pull off that wet stocking, and roll your foot in this.'

There was no help for it. Gwenda saw she must submit—better with grace than without—so took the handkerchief with quiet thanks.

Then he led the horse out of sight; and Gwenda, gladly enough, drew off the cold, clammy stocking, and threw it over the hedge, rolling her foot in the warm folds of the handkerchief. In a short time he returned.

'So—that must be at least a degree more comfortable,' he said; 'but let me make it somewhat neater for you.'

He rested her foot on his knee, and, without unrolling it, drew the ends of the handkerchief closer, knotting them tidily round the ankle.

'There—not so bad for an amateur lady's-maid, is it? Now I hope it won't hurt you to stand on the stones for a moment. Lean hard on my shoulder till you are steady. It will be easier for you to get on in that way as there is not a proper saddle.'

The stones were certainly very hard and sharp, but Gwenda did not wince half so much as he did while assisting her movements. She managed, with his careful help, to scramble to the higher portion of the heap, alongside which he brought the horse.

'You are sure he can be depended on?' she asked, hesitating a moment before leaving the safe vantage of the stone heap. 'The quietest horse might object to being ridden in this awkward fashion.'

'I will answer for him with my life,' said Darcy, meeting her smiling, questioning look with eyes that were still more eloquent than his words.

He did not care how long it might be that her very natural hesitation should keep her so, with her hand on his shoulder, and gravely quiet eyes looking into his.

So near him!—innocently careless of the wild whirl of his thoughts—unconscious that her beauty, while he worshipped it, was racking his soul with the pangs of Tantalus—the terrible bitterness of dying hope—Gwenda stood, while the fierce beating of his heart made the breath come quick from his parted lips, and sent the blood surging to his brow.

So near him, now, for this one blessed moment in all their lives! And yet—he knew—as far, and as cold, and as unattainable as the Poles are from the equator!

But Gwenda had nothing of the Rosa-Matilda school about her, and entirely neglected this fine opportunity of playing off all the airs and graces its votaries would have delighted in; and, though no braver in reality than the rest of her sex, she was disposed to make as little fuss

over the weakness as possible. Her sympathies would no doubt have been with the Irish soldier who, on hearing his comrade boasting loudly of his own unflinching front in face of the enemy, retorted,

'Arrah, Tim, be aisy now; bedad, if you wor only half as much afraid as I was all the time, you'd ha' run away the first shot!'

Besides, she had perfect confidence in Lawrence. There was no doubting the capability and power of that tall, straight figure on whose broad shoulder she leaned. And an inward voice told her he would guard her even 'as the apple of his eye.'

So without more ado she seated herself on Curraghmore's back, and took the reins from Lawrence's hands, while he arranged the stirrup so as to suit her. Then

they started at walking pace, Lawrence leading the horse.

'Let me carry the basket,' Darcy said, as he noticed it now for the first time. 'You have been on one of your errands of mercy, I see.'

'Only to the Malones. The basket is quite light, thank you, it does not trouble me.'

'Mick got damaged at Drimmeen fair, I'm told.'

'Yes. He has been in bed ever since, and of course, when he is not working, his wife and children are starving.'

'Mick is one of the hot-blooded sort,' said Lawrence, 'and he forgets that his head is not so exclusively his own—to get cracked now and then by way of amusement—as it was in his bachelor days.'

'I wish he *would* remember it,' said

Gwenda. 'It is pitiful to see those poor children famishing, and Mary's bright face getting worn and old—she that I can remember such a pretty girl.'

'I suppose,' said Lawrence—he was walking with his hand twisted in the horse's mane—'theirs is but one more instance that goes to prove a woman's only wisdom is to distrust all mankind—steer clear of matrimony altogether, in fact,—if she would retain any small modicum of happiness in life.'

'Oh,' laughed Gwenda, 'what a sweeping inference! Perhaps when Hamlet so coolly dispatches poor Ophelia to a nunnery he has a shrewd misgiving that he will make but an indifferent sort of husband. I shall think better of him in future in that new light.'

'Yes,' said Lawrence, 'his conscience

was giving him timely warning, depend upon it.'

How easily now they were getting over the ground that had seemed so long and wearisome to Gwenda in the morning. The threatened rain had passed off, and a tiny breeze was chasing the white fleeces over the sky right merrily, blowing the little tendrils of Gwenda's hair across her brow and even lifting Lawrence's shorter locks as it passed.

He kept his hand across the horse's neck, and Gwenda could only see the clearly-cut profile—the fine arch of the brow, and proud curve of the lips—as he ploughed along, utterly careless of the condition of the roads.

'After all,' Gwenda continued, musingly, 'if it were not for their being so

wretchedly poor, one might call them a tolerably happy couple. Mick is not at all a bad husband. Indeed, I have heard my father say that the very poor peasants here compare more than favourably with the same class in England.'

'Perhaps,' said Lawrence, 'if the English yokels had the same outlet for their energies—might break each other's pates occasionally in a fine, stirring, faction fight—the women would come in for less of that discipline. All things have their uses, and the humours of Drimmeen fair may be, after all, a providential institution for the safety of Irish wives.'

Gwenda laughed as she patted the horse's glossy shoulder, who was quite justifying Darcy's pledge, and moved as sedately now as though he had never

followed hounds, or carried his master across country as the crow flies, when returning late for dinner.

'How quietly he goes! I feel ashamed of having doubted his temper.'

'Curraghmore has often carried a lady,' said Lawrence. 'I wish you would ride him sometimes. I know he would suit you exactly. Let me send him up some morning.'

His voice was full of eager persuasion. But Gwenda felt she dared not accept the tempting offer.

'Oh, Mr. Darcy,' she answered, laughingly, 'don't commit yourself too rashly! —as if I did not know that for a man to offer his horse to a lady——'

'Is a sacrifice to Moloch?—almost like offering his heart. Well, that is true in some cases. But I should not be afraid

to trust you with him; and I know you can ride, though I see you out but seldom.'

'Only when Connie Standish wants a companion, and lends me a mount. But she does not much enjoy the humdrum progress that contents me. She is such a splendid horsewoman herself.'

'Oh, yes—she can ride,' said Lawrence, switching the tops off the hedges as he went along; 'a pity *that* may not count as one of the Christian virtues—some of us would have a better chance of heaven. But I should not care to see you careering after the hounds!'

'Should you not? Well, that is lucky, for you won't be disappointed.'

'I should hate to see women approach our rougher natures in the smallest degree What is it that we worship in them but

that quality of tenderness and ruth we are ourselves without? A manly woman is a profanation of Nature's sweetest intention —a degradation at best!'

'Ah,' said Gwenda, 'do not idealize us too much. Poor humanity is all made of the same clay.'

'So Mr. Wedgwood might tell you of his wares; yet a pipkin and a copy of the Portland vase are very different works—though they may be of the same material.'

They were ascending the hill now, and opening out around them the grey green of the fields was beginning to glow under the sunset, and long shadows stretched across the road from every bush and post. Rapidly the short day was drawing to a close.

'What a curious way of looking down upon you from everywhere the Grey Tower

has!' said Darcy, glancing up to where the fortress-like old building stood grimly facing the setting sun. 'It is certainly a capital situation for signalling. Could you not run me up a message sometimes from that flag-staff?'

Gwenda shook her head.

'Never shall I meddle with those ropes again! Last time I touched them, it took a whole churnful of Peggy's best butter to get my hands back to their natural colour.'

'How little we knew of each other in those old—or, rather, young days,' said Lawrence. 'I have only a hazy recollection of a shy little girl in a sun-bonnet, who kept fast hold of her father's hand while he talked to mine.'

'I remember the day you speak of,' said Gwenda. 'I shall never forget it.'

'Ah, yes—you were in agonies of terror all the time for a little white rabbit that Dash and Don were threatening to devour.'

'Yes. But you behaved so kindly, calling the dogs, and making them stay beside your pony all the time you waited, that I could not praise you enough afterwards.'

'Good heavens, did that surprise you? But indeed so it might, when one thinks of it. A boy is the one egregious mistake of nature, and everything about him seems to promise only evil continually.'

'That is awkward,' said Gwenda, laughing, 'for, you know, the boy is father to the man.'

'Oh, not a bit of it—he's no relation whatever. I am confident Sir Isaac Newton was a dunce at school, and tied squibs

to the cat's tail when his mother's back was turned.'

'Only in the interest of science, then,' said Gwenda, 'or, perhaps, in absence of mind—for he was given that way, wasn't he? But talking of that time long ago—we lost sight of you for a long while after that.'

'Yes, I went to school—after my mother's death; and then to college.'

She noticed the softened inflection in his voice as he spoke of his mother.

'And I,' she said, 'have never been twenty miles away from this in all my life.'

'Thank heaven for it, then,' he said, quickly; 'you would not be—just what you are—otherwise.'

Gwenda, letting the reins lie lightly in her hands, which rested on her knee,

turned her gaze in dreamy fashion to the far blue line of the horizon. Was there ever a young soul content to live out its span, like the caterpillar, on the self-same leaf that gave it birth?

Darcy, with his hand on the horse's neck, let his eyes dwell on the musing face which, partly turned aside, revealed the exquisite outline of the shell-like ear and long dark curve of the eyelash almost shading the cheek. How delicately the little white collar encircled the throat—how graceful were the lines of that slight young form! He knew he might be caught at any moment, and yet he could not look away.

Oh, Cupid! urchin pitiless and perverse! what a plaything dost thou make of a man's heart! How thou dost toss it to the four winds, and fling it back into

the dust, and pierce it with thy poisoned darts till it lies quivering at thy feet like a bird in its death-throes!

And so Darcy, fascinated—unthinking—gazed on, till Gwenda's glance, falling in quiet unconsciousness, encountered his impassioned eyes, so unpreparedly that the colour rushed quick to her brow, while Lawrence turned away with a sigh. For that swift signal of distress was, he knew, but the reproof of maiden modesty, not the glad recognition of welcome love. And Gwenda, hearing the sigh, woman-like, forgave. But, while she looked at the strong, shapely hand that was twined in the horse's mane, she did not see the spasm of bitter pain that fell shadow-like across his averted face.

Upwards they fared, while the light began to fade out of the sky, leaving only

the sullen glow of a smouldering fire,—soon to be swallowed up in the gloom of quick coming night.

'How suddenly the daylight leaves us,' said Gwenda. 'I hope father is not anxious about me.'

'I see the watchman has made us out,' said Lawrence; 'his glass is levelled straight upon us.'

'I am glad it is Bradley to-day,' said Gwenda. 'He will take my strange arrival, quietly. Now he is going in to say, "Miss Chetwynd is coming"—not a word more!'

'That is lucky,' said Lawrence. 'Blessed are the taciturn, sometimes.'

They wound up the avenue, and round to the hall-door, where Captain Chetwynd appeared, his fresh complexion several shades paler than usual.

'Gwenda, my darling, what is this?—what is wrong? Why—why—are you hurt?' he gasped, as her bound-up foot caught his eye.

Gwenda laughed merrily—a praiseworthy effort to give him confidence, though she could as well have cried at sight of his anxious face.

'Not the least bit hurt, father. I've had nothing more of an adventure than to lose my boot—and very nearly myself, too—in the swamp near Malone's, trying to cross the fields. If it were not for Mr. Darcy, I might be sitting down there on the roadside till now.'

The captain turned to Lawrence and took him by both hands with a grip that was more eloquent than words.

'Don't expect me to thank you, my lad,' he said; 'I never could find a word

when I wanted it in my life. But you know what that little lass is to me—that's enough!'

'My dear captain,' said Darcy, 'I should be utterly ashamed to let you thank me for so little. Thank fortune—or providence—if you like, that I was lucky enough to pass just when Miss Chetwynd got into difficulties.'

'Well, well, we'll settle all that at our leisure. Take my little girl down now—I'm getting too stiff for that myself—and come in to dinner. By George, we'll have a bottle of '32 port on the head of it!'

Lawrence went silently to Gwenda's side. As she placed her hands on his shoulders, his eyes were raised to hers. He felt her hair brush his lips—the light flutter of her breath on his cheek. Then

his arms closed round her, and that brief, dizzy moment suddenly became the acme of all life was ever to hold for him—worth all the years he was yet to see, or had seen. And inwardly he murmured,

'My darling, my darling! For just this one—last—time—mine!'

If he could have lengthened that fleeting moment by one span at the price of all else the future could bring him, he would have thought it cheaply bought.

Oh, ye gods! if ye love him, strike now. For never again will happiness, perfect and absolute, come so near him!

He lifted her from the saddle as though she were an infant—as lightly, as tenderly—and carried her across the gravel-walk to the porch, where he set her gently down.

'Neatly done, my lad,' said the captain. 'I wish I had your sinews and your youth, by George! Now, don't let us lose any more time; the mutton's getting done to rags. Come along, come along!'

But Lawrence made no move. His eyes sought Gwenda's, and rested there. And she kept looking down at her gloves, which seemed to require much pulling out and smoothing, and said never a word.

There was something in his face which puzzled the captain. He looked hard at him, and some far-back memory of his own youth made him feel a strange, quick touch of sympathy.

Lawrence approached him, and held out his hand. Yes, the look was there, plain enough. It was the sign-manual of disappointment—sad and bitter in the eyes of the young, common enough to all of us

as the years go on, bringing winter snows and biting blasts; when the flowers we loved are dead, and the sunshine has faded from our lives like a dream.

'I must not stay to-night, captain,' said Lawrence. His voice somehow was not very steady. 'I fancy my father will wait dinner for me. And—Miss Chetwynd, I am sure, is tired.'

If she had only lifted her eyes for a moment—if he could have persuaded himself that there was one faintest sign of wavering in the pale, set face—he would have accepted the hearty, kindly welcome the old man offered. But there was no straw to grasp at. Gwenda gave no sign.

Lawrence took the hand which she offered him passively. As their eyes met, something like remorse seemed to touch her.

'I am afraid I must seem very thankless, Mr. Darcy,' she said. 'I have said so little, and you have done so much for me to-day!'

But Darcy turned away quickly.

'It was nothing,' he said, 'you know how gladly I would serve you—with my life!'

The words were spoken so low that only herself heard them.

He mounted his horse and rode quickly away. And the captain led Gwenda in to prepare for dinner.

During the meal there was not much said. But the captain ruffled his hair a good deal, and glanced at Gwenda's downcast face with a puzzled, half-awakened look, and took mustard with his mutton, and chutney with his pudding, and alto-

gether behaved in a very unusual and irresponsible fashion, which, however, Gwenda failed for once to notice.

When the cloth had been removed and the captain's chair turned to the fire, Gwenda took a low seat by his side, just as she was used to sit since her babyhood; while he put his arm round her silently.

As she remained long quiet, the fire-light shining brightly in her eyes, the old man watched her. And he saw that something brighter than the firelight was gleaming on the long lashes—ay, and falling too, on to the flushed cheek. Unconsciously he drew her nearer to him, a pang of fear at his heart.

With the movement, Gwenda turned and met her father's eyes.

'My little lass,' said the old man, trying

to keep his voice very steady, 'there is something you are keeping from me, and —I think I can guess it!'

Gwenda's head sank on the arm of the chair.

'If you guess it, father,' she said, the colour mantling into her cheek, 'you will know—you will understand—how unhappy I feel!'

The captain lifted her hand by the wrist and tapped it gently on his own broad palm, gazing thoughtfully into the fire.

'My guess—has to do with Lawrence Darcy?'

'Yes, father.'

'He wants to take you from the old ship—to sail under his colours—and you feel a bit at parting with the old hulk—as is natural?'

'Father, father, I have no thought of parting with it! I am *not* going to leave you, dear, dear daddy!'

The captain stroked her soft hair for a moment without speaking.

'You don't care for the lad?' he said, watching her closely from under his heavy dark brows.

'Oh,' she said, quickly, 'that is the trouble of it! For, though I like him, and am so sorry—oh, so sorry, father, to—to give him pain, yet! oh, I do not care for him as one ought to care—as one ought to look up to and trust with one's whole heart the man you leave home and father for! And I don't believe, what is more, darling old daddy, that any such man exists—for me!'

She pressed her cheek fondly to the hand that held hers, and the captain

smiled through the tears that shone in his eyes, shaking his head the while.

'But oh, father, I never meant it! I had no thought till quite lately that he cared so much—that I might perhaps be accountable for any harm that comes to him! It sounds so vain and conceited to say this—but I cannot help feeling miserable!'

Her head had sunk on the arm of the chair, and the tears were now coming fast as summer rain.

The old captain drew her closer to him, and they sat on, together, in the red firelight very silent. But Gwenda was comforted; for she felt that her father understood and did not blame her.

And while George Chetwynd was honestly sorry for the lad he had known since a child—touched by the recollection

of the dumb pain he had caught in his eyes that very afternoon—he could not hide from himself a double feeling of satisfaction: the delight of knowing that Gwenda, the joy and blessing of his life, was not yet to leave him—that here, in this first contest for her young affection, the old dad had proved victorious—won easily in a canter.

And perhaps a deeper feeling lurked in his heart—a feeling of relief and thankfulness—that her choice had *not* fallen on a Darcy.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ALARM BELL.

Days of rain and storm followed quickly in the wake of the short-lived brightness, till they were within a few days of Christmas.

The captain was much concerned to keep the damp out of his blue lights which stood, a formidable sheaf, in the corner of his bed-room. Outside this room there ran from the ground below a wire which communicated with a bell at the head of the bed.

This was known as 'the wreck bell,'

and was rung at night by a messenger from the station when any unfortunate vessel came to grief on the neighbouring shores; the captain thereupon hastening with his men to give all the assistance in his power—which was sadly limited in those days, when lifeboats were not, as now, universal.

The weather had gone on from bad to worse, when on the evening of the fourth day the knock came as usual to the dining-room door with,

'Please, sir, any message for the station?'

'By George, Coble, look at the glass! Just come here!'

Coble stepped in, with a duck to Gwenda, and stared at the barometer,

Then the captain tapped it, and they both shook their heads.

'Yes, sir, it's uncommon nasty to-night, sir. Wind's been veerin' round since twelve o'clock. Looks like blowin' a whole gale before it's done, sir.'

'All your tackle's perfect, I hope?'

'Yes, sir, everything's in order.'

'Well, good-night. Give orders to every man jack to sleep with one eye open.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

Nights of storm were not new to them, and Gwenda from babyhood was used to the sound of the wind, tearing round the old tower, and rattling the windows as if with impatient hands. Her father read his magazine calmly, with spectacles on nose, while Gwenda, opposite, put the finishing stitches in a tiny dress for Mary Malone's baby. The turf fire blazed cheerily, though much disposed to go

bodily up the chimney with the chance opening of a door, whereby the already fierce draught was increased beyond all bounds of safety to any chimney of ordinary experience.

As the little clock on the mantel-piece struck ten, the captain began the operation of winding up his watch. It had first to be hauled up by a substantial chain from the depths of his trousers-pocket. Probably the process awakened pleasant recollections of leaving port in the merry days of yore. At any rate, when the watch appeared, it was in size and weight no poor representation of a bower anchor. It seemed to have as many coats as an onion, and, as each successive ring was peeled off, the captain hung it on his thumb, and finally administered a screwing-up to the works with a key that would

have done credit to the kitchen roasting-jack.

When this ceremony was concluded, and the watch once more let go by means of the stout chain, Gwenda folded up her work, and they withdrew for the night.

Having fastened her room-door, which, like all the doors in the house, was furnished with leather strips to keep the draught out, Gwenda placed her candle behind the window-shutter, and tried to discern something of the night. But the darkness was intense. The whole air was full of the wild fury of the wind, and mingled with it, in occasional momentary pauses, the voice of the sea sounded hoarse and sullen, like the roar of caged beasts.

Gwenda turned away with a shiver, glad to shut out the awful chaos and cheer herself with the glow of her fire, which Nellie

had zealously heaped with turf half up the chimney.

There is nothing that can equal a turf-fire for cheerfulness; it glows with such a rich, vermilion red, out of which little gold sparks keep shooting for no particular reason but just the fun of the thing—sending forth, all the time, a fragrant aroma that is like incense to the nostrils of the initiated—equally a horror to the delicate nerves of the urban visitor. And there is no escaping from its powerful fumes—everything of a textile nature smells of it; curtains, table-covers, the master's coat, and my lady's dresses. Verily, it is well for those who object to the perfume that there is one consolation—moths fly from it as from poison.

Gwenda read awhile by her fire, knowing that the storm would very probably

keep her awake if in bed. But, as the night wore on, she grew tired, and, hoping it would calm down by degrees, she at last sought her pillow and tried to sleep.

An hour or so had passed, and she was falling into the pleasant, half-conscious state preceding sleep when she was startled into quick reality by the sound of the wreck-bell. She sat up in bed and listened. Yes, her father was opening his window, and she could hear his voice distinctly.

'Hallo, who is there?'

The answer was of course inaudible to her.

'Whereabouts is she?'

Again an answer, inaudible.

'Well, just wait five minutes. I'll be with you then.'

The captain was as good as his word,

for in just that time Gwenda heard his door open and his step on the stair. She had thrown on her dressing-gown, and now went to meet him.

'Where is it, father?'

'Down at Dirrel Cove. Now, go to bed like a sensible lassie, and keep quiet till morning. I won't be back till then.'

The captain was encased in shiny oil-skin from top to toe, with a sou'-wester on his head.

'Is the man waiting, father?'

'Yes, yes, Edson's there. Good-night, my pet—don't worry yourself, mind.'

Gwenda kissed him silently, and went back to her room.

The captain descended to the porch, where he found another oil-skinned and sou'westered figure waiting with a lantern.

'Anything done when you left?' the

captain roared, with his hands held like a speaking-trumpet, for the noise of the wind was deafening.

'No, sir,' Edson roared back. 'She was coming right on to the Swords—dark as pitch—they'd been firing, and burnt a light or two; but for a while, before I left, there was no sign at all from them. I'm afraid it's a terrible bad look-out, sir.'

'God help them!' said the captain. 'It'll be next to impossible to work the rockets in this gale.'

They trudged silently down through the fields—conversation being out of the question.

The frogs in the green pool half-way down took a peep at them, and concluded it must have been a pretty bad storm that had blown down the moon—probably that big, dripping giant was taking it away to

be mended. So they watched the lantern out of sight, and, as they could not hear themselves croak for the row the wind was making, went back to their beds with a splash.

It was far from pleasant climbing the slippery fences, with everything flapping that could flap, and the rain stinging like hail as they faced the storm. But Edson was ready to make a ladder or a buffer of himself just as it might be required, and in a short time they had mounted the last stile, and were on the road leading to the station. Here the noise of the sea took precedence even of the wind. It was one continuous, angry roar, as of a million seething caldrons—the Titan rage of the Atlantic. And infinitely more awful was this terrible chaos of sound in the midst of darkness such as seemed to press

upon the eyeballs with actual weight; so dense was it; so void of ray or promise.

Till suddenly—all the heavens were afire with one vivid flash, that revealed what could only be described as a tortured world—sea and land alike quivering under the wings of the storm-fiend; every growing thing cowering flat as if dead while the winds tore over the face of the land, sowing desolation broadcast!

It was no light undertaking to walk a mile in this. Over and over again our two wayfarers had to turn their backs for a brief breathing time, or take a moment's refuge in the hedge. Even Edson, young and strong as he was, found himself tried to the utmost, but his arm was ever ready to assist, and his voice to shout cheery encouragement to the captain, which last

ought to have done good service some miles away, judging by the rate the wind ran off with it, and the stentorian tones in which it was given.

As they neared the steps leading directly to the beach, they found a few shivering creatures congregated by the low wall, who were unable to remain in their miserable cabins for fear of having them blown about their ears, and who had further been drawn here by rumours of a wreck.

'Lay fast hold of my arm, sir,' shouted Edson. 'These here steps are bad enough in daylight, but I'm blessed if I'd offer to dance a hornpipe on 'em just now!'

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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